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# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



April 2012

Vol. 117, No. 4

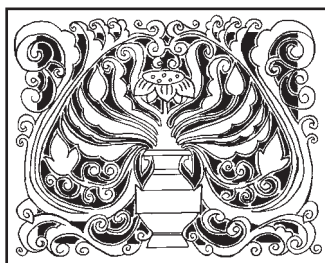


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Vol. 117, No. 4  
April 2012



Amrita Kalasha

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## Contents

Traditional Wisdom	193
This Month	194
Editorial: The Higher Laws of Life	195
Aspects of Western Philosophy and Swami Vivekananda	197
Dr Pramila Davidson	
Swami Vivekananda's Shiva Nature	203
Brahmachari Shantichaitanya	
Mahavira Hanuman: Valmiki's Hero	208
Swami Samarpanananda	
Sri Ramakrishna:	213
The 'New Man' of the Age – V	
Swami Bhajananda	
Holy Mother's Concern for Common Persons	220
Swami Tathagatananda	
Vivekananda and His Seafaring Vessels	227
Somenath Mukherjee	
Svarajya Siddhi:	233
Attaining Self-dominion	
Gangadharendra Saraswati	
Reviews	236
Reports	238

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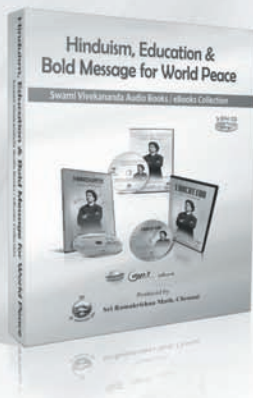
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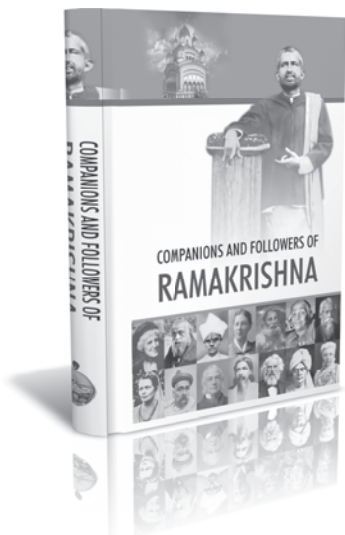
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# TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*



## *Firmly Fixed in God*

April 2012  
Vol. 117, No. 4

आविः संनिहितं गुहाचरं नाम महत्पदमत्रैतत् समर्पितम् ।  
एजत्प्राणान्निमिषच्च यदेतज्ज्ञानथ सदसद्वरेण्यं परं विज्ञानाद्यद्वरिष्ठं प्रजानाम् ॥

Effulgent, near at hand, well known as moving in the heart, and the great goal; on It are fixed all these that move, breathe, wink, or do not wink. Know this One, which comprises the gross and the subtle, which is beyond the ordinary knowledge of creatures, and which is the most desirable and the highest of all.

(*Mundaka Upanishad*, 2.2.1)

ईश्वरः सर्वभूतानां हृद्देशेऽर्जुन तिष्ठति ।  
भ्रामयन् सर्वभूतानि यन्त्रारूढानि मायया ॥

O Arjuna, the Lord resides in the region of the heart of all creatures, revolving through maya all the creatures [as though] mounted on a machine.

(*Bhagavadgita*, 18.61)

एको देवः सर्वभूतेषु गूढः सर्वव्यापी सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा ।  
कर्माध्यक्षः सर्वभूताधिवासः साक्षी चेता केवलो निर्गुणश्च ॥

The one Deity remains hidden in all beings, and is all-pervasive and the indwelling Self of all beings. He is the supervisor of actions, lives in all beings, [is] the witness, the bestower of intelligence, the Absolute, and devoid of the qualities [*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*].

(*Shevtashvatara Upanishad*, 6.11)

यतश्चोदेति सूर्योऽस्तं यत्र च गच्छति ।  
तं देवाः सर्वे अर्पितास्तदु नात्येति कश्चन । एतद्वै तत् ॥

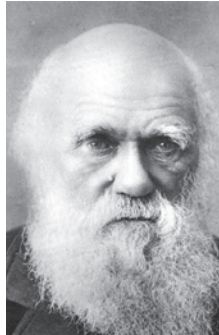
On that [Hiranyagarbha] from which the sun rises and in which it sets are fixed all the deities. None ever transcends that. This indeed is that.

(*Katha Upanishad*, 2.1.9)

# THIS MONTH

Life in its entirety encapsulates superior dimensions that self-seeking humankind needs to actualize. **The Higher Laws of Life** presents these universally acknowledged vital laws and their practical application.

**In Aspects of Western Philosophy and Swami Vivekananda** Dr Pramila Davidson, former professor at McGill and Pune Universities, shows how Swamiji went beyond current philosophical and scientific concepts to harmonize them with ancient wisdom.



Swami Vivekananda had extraordinary devotion to Shiva from his childhood. Brahmachari Shantichaitanya of the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Vrindavan, highlights the multiple facets of **Swami Vivekananda's Shiva Nature**.

Some epic characters not only stand the test of time but transcend it. One such character is **Mahavira Hanuman: Valmiki's Hero**. Swami Samarpanananda of the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur, writes about this immortal devotee of Sri Rama.



Swami Bhajanananda, Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, in the third part of **Sri Ramakrishna: The 'New Man' of the Age – V** demonstrates how Sri Ramakrishna's advent is a harbinger signalling the golden age.



In the final part of **Holy Mother's Concern for Common Persons** Swami Tathagatananda, head of the Vedanta Society of New York, discusses how Holy Mother is silently and surely transforming lives by drawing all her children to her with her extraordinary love.

In the fifth part of **Vivekananda and His Seafaring Vessels** Somenath Mukherjee, Researcher, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, describes Swamiji's return journey to India on the *Prinz Regent Luitpold*.



In the second instalment of **Svarajya Siddhi: Attaining Self-dominion**, by Gangadharendra Saraswati, fifteenth pontiff of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham, Kanchipuram, the author dismisses the objection raised against superimposition. The original text is translated and annotated by Swami Narasimhananda of the Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata.

# *The Higher Laws of Life*

ACCORDING TO the laws of thermodynamics, the universe continuously progresses towards disorder from simple ordered beginnings. As the universe expands into greater complexity, so too does life on earth, which started from simple organisms and became increasingly diverse and complex. Life on earth survives the most adverse circumstances because it evolves, adapts, and overcomes any environment that the dynamic laws generate. That is why, as the arrow of time progresses, even simple questions regarding life remain unanswered in spite of much scientific development. Furthermore, our conceptions of life and the world, rooted in selfishness and pseudo-beliefs, remain immature to comprehend higher operating laws.

Humankind has progressed stupendously through the discovery and application of many scientific principles. Unfortunately, humankind has still not learnt to fully apply these principles to solve problems related to the inner world. We are still, to a certain degree, the old savages we once were, and a little scratch unleashes that savagery. However, unlike the old days, today's progress does not let the primitive urges run wild for long, though the old savage predisposition damages us psychologically.

Valuable scientific resources are employed to whet our childish curiosity about time travel—past or future—to delay aging, to prevail over death, and to search for extraterrestrial life. In addition, gadgets keep us occupied in frivolous entertainment in a virtual reality. Such triviality has created for many a world view dominated

by escapism, fiction, unhealthy imagination, and a caricature of life. Ancient myths had the capacity to elevate human minds, while modern myths tend to degrade it. A scientific mode of thinking has not really touched and broadened human minds. We can speak about the space-time continuum, yet cannot truly include this fourth dimension in our cognition. This shows our incapacity to understand higher scientific truths and laws of life. The grand sweep of life is not thwarted by the increase of disorder, but uses disorder effectively to evolve and replicate stable forms. These laws put order into the disorder of nature; that is why we find everything elegant and perfect. The application of these laws to our inner world will make our minds elegant and ordered, and will also help efface selfishness and discontent.

The earth is beautiful because it teems with life. The universe looks beautiful because it is perceived by humans. Beauty is the nature of life, and whatever is devoid of it becomes ugly and loathsome. Beauty is one of life's higher dimensions. If we are alive to this dimension, life with all its myriad manifestations will become beautiful. Alas, we run after skin-deep beauty because our conception of life is skin-deep. Those who can understand this law of life are lifted from sordidness and loneliness and become capable of connecting to beauty all around. Even what is labelled, according to contemporary ideas, as disagreeable and nasty will, due to its fact of being alive, become beautiful. And this happens due to the underlying



sublime order. When life becomes narrow and selfish the world correspondingly transforms into a nauseating place. Such a life becomes a long-drawn trial.

Above beauty there is still a higher law: love. Love nurtures life and seeks its continuity binding us to other forms of life. Without love and beauty everything in the world would be insipid and meaningless. People who do not experience life's essence are miserable and psychologically dead, and the extremely miserable commit suicide. Life bereft of beauty and love remains merely on the biological level, driven by selfish genetic impulses. No progress in civilization and knowledge is possible without love. Every living being is subject to this glorious law.

Still higher and most evident than love is the law of truth. Life never thrives without truth, and that is the reason why nature does not create anything that is untrue. One needs no special training to detect truth from untruth, as truth is innate in every being. In individual lives whatever is false and counterfeit is opposite to the laws of life, and those who live by falsehood are most sorrowful. The whole of nature works against such lives by crippling and destroying them. Many learn to hide falsehood from others, but their bodies react violently against this, proving that falsehood is not consonant with nature. The mind that harbours untruth is a conflagration destroying peace, prosperity, and finally the personality. Sanity, fortitude, courage, altruism, fearlessness, and all the other virtues that make life worth living are derived from truth.

There exists yet another higher law of life and that is consciousness. Consciousness is not just being aware, or awake, or subject to unawareness, or a stream of consciousness flowing inside and perceived as thoughts and reactions. Consciousness envelops and suffuses life in its totality. We wrongly believe that the little

consciousness we know through our brains and bodies is the only thing there is to life, and if that little consciousness goes, everything goes. In reality, the domain of consciousness is immeasurable and the science of experiencing its full range is called yoga. Consciousness guides each and every activity of life, but since we are unaware of its workings we call it subconscious. There is no subconscious in consciousness, just as there is no superconscious. These divisions are arbitrary; consciousness cannot be fragmented nor can consciousness be separated in separate bodies. Absolute Consciousness is God. The *Aitareya Upanishad* teaches that every aspect of individual and collective life and mind in the world is 'impelled by Consciousness': 'All these have Consciousness as the giver of their reality; the universe has Consciousness as its eye, and Consciousness is its end. Consciousness is Brahman.'

What humanity requires is an overarching knowledge that combines scientific principles with the profound spirituality delineated in Vedanta. This requirement already exists in Swami Vivekananda's life and mission, which were entrusted to him by his guru Sri Ramakrishna. Swamiji formulated the basic principles of Vedanta for the modern world, consistent with certain scientific principles. One of them is that God can be worshipped using a holy symbol or God's anthropomorphic aspect, but living according to higher laws, which are but higher modes of life, is the constant worship of God immanent in creation. Swamiji, the personification of Shiva, the God who is absolute beauty, love, truth, and consciousness revealed this ancient knowledge in a contemporary idiom to humanity. By knowing that God guides everything through his divine presence, life is altered from chaos into a simple, elegant, but complete worship of that God.





# *Aspects of Western Philosophy and Swami Vivekananda*

Dr Pramila Davidson

**I**N A FAMOUS UTTERANCE Swami Vivekananda has said that a person is not an atheist because he does not believe in God; he is an atheist if he does not believe in himself! Swamiji's words are just as true of India as they are of us as individuals. If we look at the average school and college texts and syllabi, we notice an anomaly: we are studying Western texts that do not fit the Indian experience. At one level this is a good thing, as it broadens the mind, and should be encouraged. At another level it raises a few questions.

Western thought is basically secular. The separation of church and state was a turning point in the histories of countries like France and England. In India the highest, most profound thought comes from sacred texts like the Upanishads. Our greatest thinkers, like Acharya Shankara and Swami Vivekananda, have been monks! In terms of textbook education this

poses a problem. India is a multi-religious country, and students belonging to other faiths may not accept concepts from sacred Hindu texts. Even Hindus from certain sects may find some concepts unacceptable.

I would like to make a sincere appeal for further thought on this question. An idea does not cease to be valid simply because it is rooted in a specific religious tradition. Dr Radhakrishnan, in his superb book *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*,<sup>1</sup> analyses the similarities between Indian religious thought and Western ideas. Sadly, very few students, even at the postgraduate level, are familiar with his work. The average student in social sciences has heard of Adam Smith, Locke, Berkeley, Rousseau, Freud, and others. There are any number of books that trace the influence of Western thought on our political and social institutions, but there are very few texts that document how Indian thought has

influenced the world. In the nineteenth century scholars like Max Müller openly expressed Westerners' deep appreciation of Indian thought:

If I were to ask myself, from what literature we here in Europe, we who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thoughts of Greeks and Romans, and of one Semitic race, the Jewish, may draw that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact more truly human, a life, not for this life only, but a transfigured and eternal life—again I should point to India (304).

We have always been in awe of Western ideas and have ignored India's intellectual tradition. Swamiji has changed this scenario radically. His ideas are rooted in sacred Indian texts and conceptualized in a way that is consistent with science and Western philosophy. He traces the seeds of world philosophy to Kapila. His interpretation of Vedic texts has revived the study of Indian scriptures. This paper is a modest attempt to trace some of the parallels between Western and Indian philosophical thought at a very general level. I sincerely hope that scholars with a deeper grasp of the subjects covered here will take them up for consideration.

### **Evolution and Involution**

Darwin's path breaking book *The Origin of Species*<sup>2</sup> revolutionized the way in which the world around us was seen and understood. The debate on Darwin's theory has focused on the idea of creation vs evolution. Swamiji has added the concept of 'involution' to the vocabulary of evolution. Today Darwin's ideas are common knowledge, but how many colleges in India have made an attempt to commission scientific studies that take both evolution and involution as a hypothesis and carry on field research to

test this hypothesis? I have absolutely no background in natural science, but I mention it here only because it is too important to be left out of this overview.

The basic facts of Darwin's theory of evolution are well known. I am basing my review largely on the distinguished biologist Ernst Mayr's summarization of the facts of evolution:<sup>3</sup>

**Single Source** • Every living organism extant today has developed from a single, unicellular organism and is interconnected with every other organism. More complex organisms develop from simpler, cruder forms of life. The first life was the result of a 'spontaneous generation' out of an unexplained 'pre-biotic soup'—for example, sunlight acting on organic salts. In a nutshell, the first life form came out of nothing!

**Variation** • No two organisms are exactly alike. There are modifications in all species and populations.

**Competition** • Resources such as food are scarce. This results in competition between organisms. Those who are unable to adapt to environmental challenges die out and become extinct. This is 'survival of the fittest.'

**Fertility** • Is a key attribute of species. Only a few offspring survive to maturity.

**Genetics** • Organisms transmit genetic traits and beneficial genetic mutations to their offspring through the process of heredity. To use an example from Swamiji: smaller fish in the sea are hunted by larger predators. They flee and finally fly out of the water in their attempt to survive. In the process they develop wings and evolve into birds. Over time these beneficial traits accumulate and a new cluster—a bird with wings—is formed. These wings are passed on to their offspring. A new species is born. This is an example of 'macro evolution' or the development of specific life forms from a totally different type of organism.



**Natural Selection** • Only organisms that can adapt to their environments and exhibit the most favourable traits reproduce and survive. The rest die out and become extinct. For example, animals in a forest feed on the leaves of trees. The leaves at the top of the trees are the most succulent since they are the hardest to reach. Animals stretch their necks to reach the top. The strongest succeed and survive since they are the best nourished. Their struggle to reach the top leads to stretched necks, which are inherited by their offspring. Thus giraffes evolved through the preservation and passing on of beneficial genetic traits by slow, imperceptible changes.

To quote Darwin: 'Natural selection acts only by taking advantage of slight successive variations; she can never take a great and sudden leap, but must advance by short and sure, though slow steps.'<sup>4</sup>

There has been some criticism of this slow, slight, gradual evolution. The argument, so far as I can make out, is that a complex system like the eye, for instance, is an 'irreducibly complex system' that appeared all at once. It is not the result of cumulative evolution. There are thousands of cellular organisms that are just as complex and in which there is no evidence of gradual modification over a span of time. Richard Dawkins debunks this claim in *The Blind Watchmaker*<sup>5</sup> and *The God Delusion*<sup>6</sup>. He is overwhelmed by the complex symmetry of nature, but credits it to the 'elegant solution of natural selection' (145): 'The living results of natural selection overwhelmingly impress us with the appearance of design as if by a master watchmaker. ... Natural selection is the blind watchmaker, blind because it does not see ahead, does not plan consequences, has no purpose in view.'<sup>7</sup>

A hundred million *x*'s could connect an 'astonishingly complicated self-replicating system',

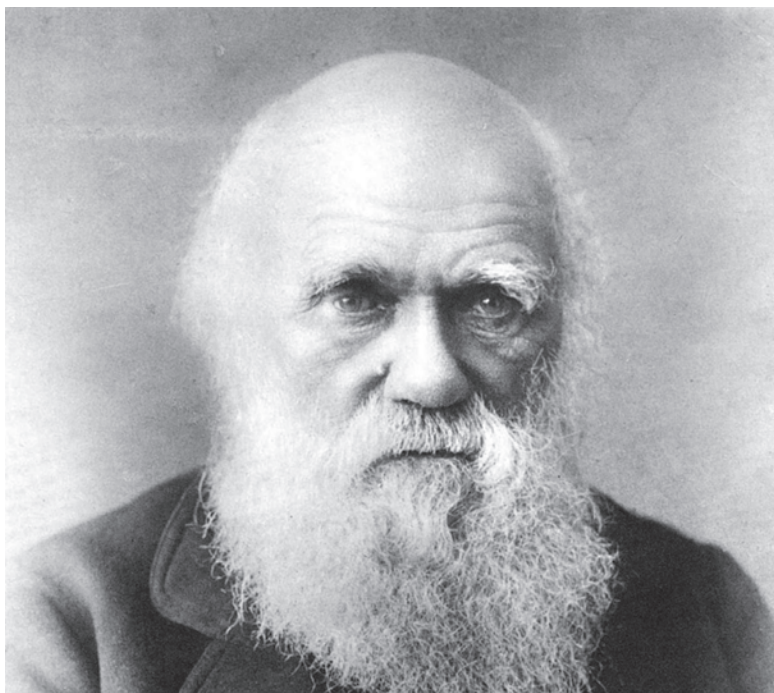
like the human eye, to the evolutionary cycle. These tiny steps are not random. They pull out weeds and end in an 'astonishingly complicated self-replicating system'. Dawkins accepts the critical flaw in natural selection: 'We cannot escape the need to postulate a *single-step* chance event in the origin of cumulative selection itself' (140).

As is mentioned above, Swamiji's comments on evolution introduce the concept of involution, which effectively deals with the problem of a '*single-step* chance event':

Every evolution presupposes an involution. ... You can only get the amount of energy out of a machine which you have previously put into it. Something cannot be produced out of nothing. If a man is an evolution of the mollusc, then the perfect man—the Buddha-man, the Christ-man—was involved in the mollusc. ... That energy which manifests itself slowly through various stages until it becomes the perfect man, cannot come out of nothing. It existed somewhere; and if the mollusc or the protoplasm is the first point to which you can trace it, that protoplasm, somehow or other, must have contained the energy.<sup>8</sup>

Swamiji refutes two critical elements of the theory of evolution. The first is the idea of 'spontaneous generation'. Something cannot come out of nothing. The mollusc is the involved Buddha. Christ is the evolved mollusc. This takes care of the need for a pre-existing order, which is just an unexplained assumption in evolutionary theory. The second is the idea of involution: evolution does not proceed in an ascent that marks the gradual development of complex organisms from simpler, unicellular life forms:

The proof of evolution is simply this: you find a series of bodies from the lowest to the highest rising in a gradually ascending scale. But from that how can you insist that it is always from



Charles Robert Darwin (1809–82)

the lower upwards, and never from the higher downwards? The argument applies both ways, and if anything is true, I believe it is that the series is repeating itself in going up and down. How can you have evolution without involution? Our struggle for the higher life shows that we have been degraded from a high state (2.173–4).

This theory brings in the idea of a *kalpa*, cycle. Simpler life forms or ‘finer forms’ develop into highly complex organisms. They become gross. The universe in which we live developed from a preceding ‘fine universe’ after a period of rest or a state of chaos. This state is ‘a period of very fine unmanifested action.’ The seed develops into the tree, which then slowly degenerates into the seed form. Thus, the cycle of evolution and involution continues (2.206–8).

The idea of a single source being at the root of evolution is consistent with Vedantic thought. There is, however, a radical difference: Swamiji’s analysis shows that if the perfect man, the Bud-dha-man who manifests flawless intelligence,

is the highest peak of evolution, then the seed must also be perfect intelligence. In the beginning this intelligence is involved. It is not that intelligence is present only in higher life forms, rather intelligence manifests itself in more evolved creatures. The beginning and end of each cycle is the same: God (2.210). The sum total of energy in the universe is constant.

Coming to the concept of natural selection, Swamiji goes back to Patanjali:

Declares our Yogi Patanjali—*jaty-antaraparinamah prakrityapurat*; One species—the Jati is species—

changes into another species—evolution; *Pari-nama* means one thing changing into another, just as one species changes into another. Where do we differ from the Europeans? Patanjali says, *Prakrityapurat*, ‘By the infilling of nature.’ The European says, it is competition, natural and sexual selection, etc. that forces one body to take the form of another. But here is another idea, a still better analysis, going deeper into the thing and saying, ‘By the infilling of nature’ ...

Says Patanjali: *Tatah kshetrikavat*—‘Like the peasant irrigating his field.’ Through a little corner of his field he brings water from a reservoir somewhere, and perhaps he has got a little lock that prevents the water from rushing into his field. When he wants the water, he has simply to open the lock, and in rushes the water of its own power. The power has not to be added, it is already there in the reservoir’ (3.406–8).

Swamiji continues explaining that each one of us has an infinite reservoir of strength; our bodies are the ‘lock’ that stops it from rushing forth. In other words, it is not a question of competition or the survival of the fittest or even

a struggle for scarce resources. It is the 'infilling of nature', the ability to access the infinite, the eternal, the unlimited. As a person evolves from *tamas*, through *rajas*, to *sattva*, one in fact becomes more and more self-denying and Self-affirming. 'Not I but Thou' becomes the watchword. This holding of oneself as a sacrifice for others, as in the case of Christ or even for an animal in the case of Buddha, is the exact opposite of Darwin's evolutionary theory. Swamiji's arguments are a radical revision of the evolutionary theory. We need to sit up, understand, and reorient our thinking.

### **The Idealist-Realist Controversy**

The study of philosophy in Indian colleges often begins with Plato and Aristotle. If there is one recurrent theme in Western philosophy, it is the debate between the idealists, with Plato at the front, and the realists, headed by Aristotle. For Plato everything that exists in the world is a copy of a copy of a perfect, heavenly form. Thus, all the cats on earth are imperfect copies of an ideal heavenly cat.<sup>9</sup> Man is made in the image of God. True knowledge comes from a grasp of the ideal. The line of argument is deductive, qualitative, inspired. Aristotelian logic is inductive, quantitative, impersonal, and empirical. If we want to understand the essence of a 'cat', we need to study a great many cats, note their characteristics, and then arrive at an idea of 'cat'. By and large scientific research is based on these elements of Aristotelian logic.

Swamiji dismisses this entire controversy in one sentence:

Bhagawan Kapila demonstrated ages ago that human consciousness is one of the elements in the make-up of all the objects of our perception and conception, internal as well as external. Beginning with our bodies and going up to Ishvara, we may see that every object of our

perception is this consciousness plus something else, whatever that may be; and this unavoidable mixture is what we ordinarily think of as reality. Indeed it is, and ever will be, all of the reality that is possible for the human mind to know. Therefore to say that Ishvara is unreal because He is anthropomorphic, is sheer nonsense. *It sounds very much like the occidental squabble on idealism and realism, which fearful-looking quarrel has for its foundation a mere play on the word 'real'.* The idea of Ishvara covers all the ground ever denoted and connoted by the word real, and Ishvara is as real as anything else in the universe; and after all, the word real means nothing more than what has now been pointed out.<sup>10</sup>

Two thousand years of Western philosophy reduced to 'a mere play on the word "real"! I do not mind admitting that I was somehow perturbed when I first read Swamiji's words. The heavenly 'cat' is as real as the earthly 'cat' because it is a function of our perception: consciousness plus something else. Back to Sri Ramakrishna: God is as real as the objects and people we see around us. Our inability to see Him is a bit like the blind man's inability to perceive form, colour, and so forth. As our minds evolve to higher planes of consciousness, new levels of experience open up. We cannot deny the vision of the mystic simply because it is not part of our personal experience. Swamiji pushes both experience and consciousness to limits that touch the eternal. We do not begin our lives as babies; we do not end it as corpses; we begin and end as germs carrying a load of past karma. There is another important aspect to be noted here: the use of the word 'consciousness' rather than 'empirical experience'. Swamiji's conceptualization impacts not just philosophy but empirical research. We need to understand and acknowledge these insights and use them as a foundation for research.



### Phenomenology and Subjective Consciousness

The idea that subjective consciousness is an integral part of reality as we experience it has been a part of Indian thought since Kapila. In Western philosophy the study of consciousness begins with Plato's allegory of the cave, but it became an organized discipline more or less with Descartes, Kant, Locke, the British empiricists, and Schopenhauer.

Let me illustrate this with an example from phenomenology. The word 'phenomenology' comes from the Greek *phaimenon*, which literally means 'appearance as opposed to reality'. For example, there are several people in a room looking at a table. A carpenter notices the quality of wood and workmanship, a businessman wonders if it is large enough for a meeting of ten people, a housewife sees it as a dining table, and so forth. In each case we have a subjective perception coupled with the intention of the perceiver, and finally the table or what Kant calls the thing-in-itself—*ding an sich*—or noumenon. Thus, what we experience is consciousness plus the table. Swamiji adds a critical element to phenomenology: there are two elements, internal and external, in every act of perception. The table I see is the external thing-in-itself or  $x$ . What I 'see' is a result of the table acting on my mind. As a result external perception can be categorized as 'mind +  $x$ '. This is roughly the stance that phenomenology takes. This act of perception is incomplete without my 'unknown and unknowable' real self. This internal thing-in-itself can be categorized as  $y$ . When I refer to myself by my name it is  $y$  + mind. Therefore, our world is  $x$  + mind (external) and  $y$  + mind (internal). This constitutes the totality of our perception.

In Advaita Vedanta  $x$  and  $y$  are both unknown and unknowable qualities. Swamiji says: "The  $y$ , the internal thing-in-itself, which, combining with mind, manufactures existence, knowledge,

and love, is called by the Vedantists, Existence absolute, Knowledge absolute, Bliss absolute. That real existence is limitless, unmixed, uncombined, knows no change, is the free soul; when it gets mixed up, muddled up, as it were, with the mind, it becomes what we call individual existence' (2.459).

The concepts of  $x$  and  $y$  are not limited by time, space, and causation, which are attributes of the mind. Since they are beyond the mind,  $x$  and  $y$  are one entity. They have no attributes of their own. They take on the qualities of the mind. There is just one universe and one existence: Brahman. An aspect of this existence seen through the mist of time, space, and causation is God. When that Self is behind the 'little universe', that is, the human body, it is the soul. God and man are one (2.461). As we can see, Swamiji's formulation is far more comprehensive and complete than the concepts of phenomenology or the ideas of Kant, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Schopenhauer.

(To be concluded)

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# Swami Vivekananda's Shiva Nature

Brahmachari Shantichaitanya

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, after his pilgrimage to Amarnath in Kashmir, was found to be very uncommunicative and detached. His disciple Sharatchandra Chakravarti, finding him silent and grave in Belur Math, enquired about his health and experience at the holy cave-shrine. He was utterly astonished to hear Swamiji exclaiming: 'Since visiting Amarnath, I feel as if Shiva is sitting on my head for twenty-four hours and would not come down.'<sup>1</sup> Sister Nivedita, who accompanied Swamiji on the pilgrimage, narrates the severe austerities he underwent and his spiritual exaltation. Describing Swamiji's great fascination for the Himalayas she says: 'The very air of the Himalayas was charged for him with the image of that "eternal meditation" ... he

had searched long, he said, for the words that the rivers and waterfalls uttered, amongst the mountains, before he realized that it was the eternal cry of "Bom! Bom! Hara! Hara!" (9.363). Nivedita writes of Swamiji speaking of Shiva: 'He is the great God—calm, beautiful, and silent! And I am His great worshipper' (ibid.). Indeed, Shiva's personality and presence, with its power and glory, thoroughly encompassed Swamiji.

The *Shiva Mahimnah Stotra*, a hymn on Shiva's greatness, says: 'Thy greatness is beyond mind and speech; who will praise that which even the Vedas describe with trepidation.'<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Swamiji's Shiva nature is difficult to fathom; yet, one sometimes obtains glimpses of its profoundness.

### **Shiva Nature from Childhood**

Bhuvaneshwari Devi, Swamiji's mother, desiring a worthy son requested an old aunt of the Datta family in Varanasi to worship Vireshwara Shiva every Monday for a year, while she at home in Calcutta prayed, fasted, and beseeched the Lord for his grace. As the special vow was drawing to a close, one night she had a vivid dream in which 'she saw the Lord Shiva rouse Himself from His meditation and take the form of a male child who was to be her son.'<sup>3</sup> She awoke and wondered whether the dream was true. In course of time she gave birth to the child that brought forth the vision of Shiva's transcendental glory before the mortal gaze of the world.

Narendra, as the child came to be called, bubbled with energy all the while and proved to be extremely restless and mischievous. Bhuvaneshwari Devi and the entire household had a difficult task in quieting the spirited child. When all methods failed to pacify Narendra, his mother would pour water over his head uttering 'Shiva! Shiva!' or would say: 'Shiva will not let you go to Kailash if you do not behave' (I.12). This would immediately have the desired effect. Sometimes, unable to put up with the child's pranks, she would cry out: 'I prayed to Shiva for a son and He has sent me one of his demons!' (Ibid.).

Narendra felt a great attraction for monks and mendicants and would offer them whatever was near at hand. Sometimes he would go about at home with nothing on but a loin-cloth proudly declaring: 'I am Shiva! Look, I am Shiva!' (I.17). He used to meditate before an image of Rama and Sita and soon be absorbed, till one day his family's coachman, whom he looked upon as a great authority on everything, vehemently decried marriage, throwing the boy into a dilemma. How could he now worship Rama and Sita who were married? Perplexed,

the boy ran to his mother, who soothed the boy's qualms by suggesting he worship Shiva instead. From then on Narendra engaged himself in the worship of Shiva with the same devotional zeal. Once, when he was thus absorbed in meditation before the image of Shiva, a big cobra slithered across the room. He was with his friends, who noticed the snake, roared in fright, and ran for life, while Narendra, oblivious of the commotion, remained absorbed in meditation. Fortunately, the snake left the place without harming anyone. Shiva, we must remember, wears snakes around his body.

Swamiji's devotion to Shiva grew stronger with the passing of time. In his later years he would now and then whisper to himself in a soft and gentle voice: 'Shiva! Shiva!' Sister Christine reminisces: 'We had noticed that when something disturbed him, after allowing himself to be troubled by it for a few minutes, his "Shiva! Shiva" seems to end it.'<sup>4</sup> Once, when Mrs Ole Bull gave him some worldly-wise advice about the proper way of doing things, he replied: 'Thou art my right, Thou my wrong, my Shiva. Lord, since a child I have taken refuge in Thee. Thou wilt be with me in the tropics or at the poles, on the tops of mountains or in the depth of oceans. My stay—my guide in life—my refuge—my friend—my teacher—my God—my real Self, Thou wilt never leave me, *never*. I know it for sure.'<sup>5</sup>

### **Some Saw Shiva in Swamiji**

Swamiji was not just a mere devotee or worshipper of Shiva, he embodied him. Sri Ramakrishna used to call this Narendra's 'Shiva-nature or the Shiva-power'.<sup>6</sup> In fact, long before meeting his favourite disciple, Sri Ramakrishna had the vision of a streak of light flashing across the sky from Varanasi towards Calcutta. From this vision he had prophesied that a spiritual soul with a Shiva nature was going to be born. His prophecy



was confirmed when he met Narendra. During one of Swamiji's early visits to Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna said to him: 'Look! In you is Shiva! In me is Shakti! And these two are One!' (1.92). He could not bear to hear anyone criticize Narendra, for such an act was *shiva-ninda*, blasphemy. Sri Ramakrishna would say: 'Here the Lord Shiva has been criticized. Please sprinkle a little Ganges water.'<sup>7</sup> His deep love and admiration for Narendra stemmed from such visions and the consequent conviction he obtained regarding his real nature. By the same token Sri Ramakrishna would not accept personal service from him.

Not only Sri Ramakrishna but also a few of his disciples carried the conviction that Swamiji was Shiva manifest. Once, in order to persuade Swami Brahmananda to return to Belur Math from Varanasi, Swami Premananda told him: 'Swamiji is our Lord Shiva and he resides in Belur' (206). The great saint Nag Mahashaya, at the sight of Swami Vivekananda in a high spiritual state, exclaimed: 'Jai Shankara! Blessed am I to see before me the living Shiva!'<sup>8</sup> The saint stood before Swamiji with folded hands. The other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna had no doubt heard Sri Ramakrishna's appraisal of Swamiji: 'Behold! Here is Naren. See! See! Oh what power of insight he has! It is like the shoreless sea of radiant knowledge! The Mother, Mahamaya Herself, cannot approach within less than ten feet of him! She is barred by the very glory which She has imparted to him!' (1.134).

At least once Swami Vivekananda himself gave a hint of his Shiva nature in an amusing incident that we come to know from Sister Christine's reminiscences:

In New York once there was [a] pitiful little group that clung to him with pathetic tenacity. In the course of a walk he had gathered up first one and then another. This ragged retinue

returned with him to the house of 58th Street which was the home of the Vedanta Society. Walking up the flight of steps leading to the front door the one beside him thought, 'Why does he attract such queer abnormal people?' Quick as a flash he turned and answered the unspoken thought, 'You see, they are Shiva's demons.'<sup>9</sup>

Anyone who carefully observes the commonly worshipped photograph of Swamiji will not fail to notice the striking similarity and sublimity it bears with the meditation posture of Shiva in which the great god is generally represented. Allowing for the differences in attire, both Swamiji and Shiva are immersed in the bliss of a transcendental state. Moreover, like all other deities, Shiva epitomizes certain divine qualities and these we find manifest in Swamiji as well. Both are monks and yogis. Once the monks at the monastery at Belur dressed Swamiji as Shiva, complete with matted hair, trident, white ashes smeared on the body, bracelets, and rudraksha beads. The unspeakable beauty of Swamiji as Shiva could not be described. 'All present declared afterwards that they felt as if Shiva Himself, of youthful, ascetic form, was before them.'<sup>10</sup>

Every depiction of Shiva inspires awe. He is the most majestic god. A number of Swamiji's friends who had the blessed privilege of meeting him have left a glowing account of the innate personal dignity and majesty he manifested at all times and especially on the stage while delivering lectures. One of them said: 'It would be impossible for me to describe the overwhelming force of Swamiji's presence. He could rivet attention upon himself; and when he spoke in all seriousness and intensity—though it seems well-nigh incredible—there were some among his hearers who were literally exhausted. ... His personality was at once awe-inspiring and sublime. He had the faculty of literally annihilating



one if he so chose' (2.89–90). Mr Thomas Allan used to make announcements before Swamiji's lecture, and while introducing him to the audience expressed that he 'felt like a pigmy and saw him as an immense giant' (2.513). After this experience he could not bring himself to stand besides Swamiji but would finish his job by taking his position at the foot of the platform. Brahmachari Gurudas, later Swami Atulananda, writes in his memoirs:

Swamiji was so simple in his behaviour, so like one of the crowd that he did not impress me so much when I first saw him. ... He walked about the room, sat on the floor, laughed, joked, chatted—nothing formal. ... But when I saw him for a few minutes standing on a platform surrounded by others, it flashed into my mind: 'What a giant, what strength, what manliness, what a personality! Every one near him looks so insignificant compared with him.' It came to me almost as a shock, it seemed to startle me. ... I felt that Swamiji had unlimited power, that he could move heaven and earth if he willed it.<sup>11</sup>

Such descriptions by a number of people cannot account for any amount of human greatness. It must be attributed to the divine Shiva-power that found expression through Swamiji's personality.

### **The Compassionate and the Ascetic**

Though Shiva is awesome, he is also compassionate and *asutosha*, easily pleased. The Puranas abound with stories illustrating these aspects of Shiva. One such story is about Shiva's act of saving the three worlds from the poison *halahala*, which emerged during the churning of the milk-ocean by the gods and the demons, by drinking it. To this well-known story Swamiji has given a thoughtful interpretation. According to him, the story is illustrative of the compassionate nature of a true monk:

All beings, who dwell within the folds of earthly consciousness, churn the ocean of Maya, that is, human life, and obtain treasures that are pleasing to the senses; but soon the poison, death, must come to end the show. The monk, however, stands apart. Absorbed in the Self, he desires none of the enticing gifts which Maya offers; but like Mahadeva, he is ready to come to the assistance of those who lust after sense pleasures, when, in the presence of death, they come to him (the monk) to save their souls. Then he destroys their Maya—their ignorance—and releases them from the fear of death. He also shows by this that the man of Realization has no fear of death.<sup>12</sup>

The above interpretation of the story is a splendid summarization of Swamiji's attitude towards life in general. He had nothing to gain personally through the years of demanding work that he engaged in. Rather, being accustomed to dwell in a high spiritual realm, it was extremely painful for him to even come in touch with earthly concerns. Nonetheless, obeying the command of his Master, he laid down his life to spread the message of Vedanta and of his Master both in India and abroad. At the beginning of his mission in the West, he had to face virulent attacks from those who tried to discredit his character by spreading calumny. Swamiji, on the other hand, had only blessings for all his detractors. He later said that he was ready to give even a thousand bodies to help one out of worldly bondage. Such was the compassionate heart of Swamiji.

In one of his oft-quoted exhortations, Swamiji reminds Indians that their ideal is the 'great Ascetic of ascetics, the all-renouncing Shankara'.<sup>13</sup> Shiva is always thought of as an ideal yogi. Though the Lord of the universe, he finds joy in living a most austere life. He dwells in either icy Kailash or in dreadful cremation grounds. He has a skull for the begging bowl,

tiger-skin for garment, and is besmeared with ashes. A host of noisy ghosts are his companions. He reduced Madana, Cupid, to ashes by opening his third eye, which is symbolic of higher intuitive knowledge. He is mostly immersed in the bliss of samadhi and sometimes dances out of joy. He is the principal deity for monks belonging to the ten denominations established by Acharya Shankara.

Swami Vivekananda too is, first and foremost, a monk of the highest order, a *paramahansa*. In and through his multifaceted character it was the monk that always shone brilliantly. Even his patriotism and concern for the poor had its basis on his unitary vision of Reality. And whatever be the thought or work he was engaged in, a part of his mind ever dwelt in that realm—it used to take him only a blink of an eye to withdraw his mind and become absorbed in a higher plane. Sri Ramakrishna would say that he was a *nityasiddha*, ever-perfect, and would lovingly address him as ‘my Shuka’—Shuka is an ideal *paramahansa*. While in the West, though he was surrounded by enticing pomp and material prosperity, he remained as he was in India, the same monk finding joy only in the spirit. Sometimes the monk inside him would revolt against ‘Mother’s work’ of preaching and doing good. After having achieved great success and being lionized by society, he once vented the anguish of his heart: ‘I long, oh! I long for my rags, my shaven head, my sleep under the trees, and my food from begging! ... Never more in my life I realised more forcibly the vanity of the world’ (6.359).

Unlike incarnations of Vishnu, Shiva’s incarnations are neither many nor well known. Virabhadra, Bhairava, and Sharabha are spoken of as incarnations of Shiva, but they are Puranic characters. There are only two historical persons believed and revered as Shiva’s incarnations: Acharya Shankara and Swami Vivekananda.

One day at Belur Math Swamiji asked his disciple Sharatchandra Chakravarty to massage his legs a bit. The disciple obeyed with alacrity, though his massaging was too weak. Swamiji asked him to call Brahmananda, and when the latter arrived Swamiji said: ‘Raja, I don’t feel well today. I asked this Bangal to give me a massage but he did not do it well. So I have called you.’<sup>14</sup> Immediately his brother-disciple began to massage Swamiji vigorously like an expert for a couple of hours. When the exhausted swami returned to his room, Sharatchandra followed and enquired: ‘Maharaj, I have come to you to resolve my confusion. I have heard you are the spiritual son of the Master, and I have seen how much Swamiji respects you. I don’t understand why Swamiji asked you to give him a massage. At this Brahmananda said: “What do you say? Don’t you know he is the Lord Shiva himself!”’ (ibid.).



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# Mahavira Hanuman: Valmiki's Hero

Swami Samarpanananda

**D**URING SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S childhood, whenever the Ramayana was recited in his neighbourhood, he was sure to be present, listening with rapt attention to the thrilling episodes of Sri Rama's life. The matchless devotee Mahavira Hanuman and his matchless deeds particularly attracted him. Once a reader said that Hanuman lived in banana-groves and Naren, eager to meet him, entered a thick grove on his way home. He waited and prayed for a long time, but Hanuman did not appear. Bitterly disappointed he returned. At home they comforted Naren with this explanation: 'Hanuman had more than likely gone forth on some urgent mission of Shri Rama, and that solaced him.'<sup>1</sup> Later Swamiji held up the ideal of Hanuman for the nation: 'Can you bring in the worship of Sri Ramachandra and Mahavira in this country? ... The country must be raised. The worship of Mahavira must be introduced.'<sup>2</sup>

Everything in the world cannot be satisfactorily expressed through strict principles of logic, thus myths are used to present certain concepts and truths. Far from myths being unreasonable, the tendency to think, create, and live by myths is prevalent all over the world. Ancient myths were traditionally passed down for generations and often included narratives about divine, semi-divine, or heroic beings. These myths were linked to the spiritual and religious life of a people and were endorsed either by sages, priests, or rulers. If this spiritual link is broken, myths lose their qualities and become mere folk tales, fables, and legends. For example, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* contain elements of religion, and due to this people

used to memorize and revere them. But when the link between myths and people disappeared, those epics became secular poetry and mere tales.

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata, classed *itihasa*—literally history—are old mythological works. Many people commit the mistake of equating *itihasa* with modern concepts of history, resulting in confusion. Historicity is not the aim of these works nor is *itihasa* entirely myth. The epics are composed around real characters and use a mythological style of narration to encourage people towards the *purusharthas*, four aims of human life. Herein lies the creativity of the two great poets Valmiki and Vyasa. According to the *Vishnu Dharmashastra*: '*Itihasa* teaches the ways and means to the four goals of life: dharma, artha, kama, and moksha, through stories from the past.'<sup>3</sup>

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are mature works that discuss values and also examine conflict situations in which two contradictory values are equally valid. In these latter situations an individual's conscious choice in a particular setting is praised, even if it be condemned in another milieu. For this reason these works often paint human virtues in shades of grey, instead of showing them in black and white. It is this nearness to the realities of human life that makes the Ramayana and the Mahabharata popular and useful. Valmiki made use of folklore, traditions, poetic imagination, and Vedic wisdom to weave the Ramayana into a superb tale and create unique characters. Being the first poetic work outside the Vedas, the Ramayana also is a bridge between Vedic and later poetry.

### The Fascinating Character of Hanuman

Valmiki, with his creative genius and his understanding of religion and spirituality, created a superb character in the form of Hanuman, a colossus who has no physical, moral, intellectual, or spiritual weaknesses. An entire section of the Ramayana, called 'Sundara Kanda', is devoted to Hanuman's glory and achievements. This is unusual because Sri Rama, who is the central character of the epic, does not appear in this section.

Many later works like *Bhushundi Ramayana*, *Ananda Ramayana*, *Adbhuta Ramayana*, *Adhyatma Ramayana*, *Ramacharitmanas*, *Kakavin Ramayana* of Indonesia, *Ramakavacha* of Bali, *Hikayat Seri Rama* of Malaysia, *Maradia Lavana* of Philippines, and *Ramakien* of Thailand gave new dimensions to Valmiki's characters. But Hanuman is so fascinating and complete that no poet since has deviated from how Valmiki portrayed him.

*Adhyatma Ramayana*, *Ramacharitmanasa*, and some other Ramayana traditions introduce the concept of ideal bhakti through the character of Hanuman. However, it was left for *Hanuman Chalisa* by Tulsidasa to describe the devotion of and for Mahavira Hanuman in a unique poetic style. This short work of forty verses has become a classic because of its brevity, beauty, clarity, and devotion.

Punjikasthala, an apsara, due to her improper conduct was cursed by Brihaspati, guru of the gods, to be born as Anjana, a female *vanara*, monkey. Anjana married Kesari, a powerful *vanara* chief. Once Vayu, the wind god, attracted by Anjana's beauty passed his power to the noble lady with the words: 'You will bear in your womb a strong and intelligent boy, and he will possess the power of locomotion like me.'<sup>4</sup>

Valmiki does not describe the physical appearance of Hanuman, except by saying that he was very strong and could transform himself into

any size. However, Tulasidasa describes Mahavira's appearance: 'You are of beautiful golden colour and your dress is pretty. You wear earrings and have long curly hair. You carry in your hand a lightning bolt along with a victory flag and wear the sacred-thread across your shoulder.'<sup>5</sup>

The first mention of Hanuman in the Valmiki Ramayana occurs when he notices Sri Rama and Lakshmana on the banks of lake Pampa. To find out who they are Hanuman takes the form of an ordinary mendicant and humbly introduces himself as the minister of Sugriva, the exiled monkey prince. Sri Rama carefully watches him speak and comments to Lakshmana:

Nobody can talk like this, as he has just now spoken, unless he is versed in the Rig, Yajur, and Sama Vedas. He must have heard the whole of the Grammar many a time, for though he has talked much, not a single slang has escaped from his lips and there was no distortion of his face, brows or eyes while he spoke. His words are sweet and simple. How clear, distinct and sweet voice issues from his throat, chest, and roof of the palate. He knows what words should be employed first and what last, that enables one to understand the import of each word and clearly realise the object indicated by them. It is a wonderful speech; it can please even one's enemy, ready to strike with an upraised sword.<sup>6</sup>

When Sri Rama killed Vali, the latter's wife Tara lamented inconsolably and prayed to be killed by the same arrow that killed her husband. Hanuman calmed her down saying: 'All creatures reap the consequences of their acts, good or bad. You look poor and distressed with sorrow, but tell me for which worthy object of sorrow you are thus mourning? You are yourself an object of pity, yet for which poor object of pity you are showing this generosity? I know not who mourns for one having himself this body, like[ned] unto a bubble of water' (303).



When the search for Sita began, Hanuman was chosen by Sugriva to go to the south with the words: 'O hero! Your course is irresistible in heaven and earth, and through the sky. You know fully the regions of the Asuras, Gandharvas, Uragas, of gods and men. Your strength, fleetness and speed are like that of your father, the Wind God. ... You are versed in polity and possess extraordinary intelligence, courage, and strength' (341-2).

On hearing these words of Sugriva, Sri Rama became confident of Hanuman's chances of success and gave him the engraved ring to be presented to Sita as a credential.

### **Hanuman's Strength**

Mahavira's strength and daring has fascinated everyone for generations. According to the Ramayana, when Hanuman was a child, he jumped to catch the rising sun believing it to be a shiny fruit. Indra, king of the gods, was enraged at the child's audacity and hurled his *vajra*, thunderbolt, at him. The weapon struck the child's jaw and made him unconscious. Upset, Vayu became furious and stopped blowing. As living beings and gods began to asphyxiate, Indra withdrew the effect of his thunderbolt and the gods revived Hanuman. To pacify Vayu, Brahma offered a boon that no weapon would ever harm Hanuman, and Indra offered the boon that death would never touch him. However, a permanent mark was left on the child's *hanu*, chin, by the thunderbolt, which explains his name.

When the problem of crossing the ocean to search for Sita became apparent, the throng of monkeys realized that none of them had the strength to cross it except Hanuman. He was then reminded of his strength by Jambuvan, and as the memory of his capabilities slowly dawned, Hanuman started growing in size and massive strength. 'Hanuman assumed a form fit

for crossing the ocean. The Vanaras were greatly astonished at this, as in olden times people were struck with wonder seeing Vamana [Vishnu] covering the three worlds' (359). Hanuman realized he was invincible, that he could even crush the world with his strength and move wherever he willed.

While crossing the ocean he outsmarted Surasa, the mother of serpents, by first increasing his size to a great extent and then suddenly becoming very small to thus enter her mouth and safely exit. This showed his presence of mind in a difficult situation. Further, he killed the demoness Simhika by a single blow before entering Lanka. Observing this feat the gods commented: 'He who has patience, intelligence, keen sight, and skill like you never loses his heart in anything' (368). The demoness Lanka, invincible patron goddess of Lanka, challenged Hanuman when he tried to enter the city. Hanuman initially ignored her, but when she hit him, he beat her up thoroughly. This was the beginning of the end of the great empire of Ravana.

Hanuman is worshipped as the ideal brahmachari and a perfect master of his senses. How great was this aspect is noticed when Hanuman entered Ravana's splendid palace at night in search of Sita. He went around the bedchamber looking at the hundreds of wives of Ravana, who were fast asleep in various postures and clothes in disarray. He concluded that Sita could not be found there, but became worried about his own moral transgression. He thought: 'It is surely unrighteous to see another's wife under the influence of sleep. I have never cast my eyes since my birth on another's wife. Surely I shall be guilty of iniquity ... but my mind has not been least stirred by it. It is the mind that induces the sense either to virtue or to vice' (381). This is the ultimate yardstick in mind-control and also in deciding issues regarding virtue and vice.

When Hanuman located a terror-stricken Sita in the Ashoka Grove, he wanted to reveal his mission by narrating the story of Rama-Sita to her. But then he thought: 'If I speak in Sanskrit like a Brahmana, then Sita may be greatly frightened thinking me to be Ravana [who was capable of adopting any physical form]. It is, therefore, proper to speak in the ordinary dialect of a common man' (405). That is how he won Sita's confidence. And when she asked him to step before her so that she could see him, he appeared in a humble form. After meeting Sita, Hanuman decided to destroy a part of Ravana's army, so he killed many important demons. Later he was captured tactfully, since no weapon could harm him, by Meghanada, Ravana's son, and was brought before Ravana. There he scolded Ravana for his wickedness, which made the king order his tail to be burnt. Escaping with a tail blazing Hanuman leaped from place to place and burnt down a large part of the capital.

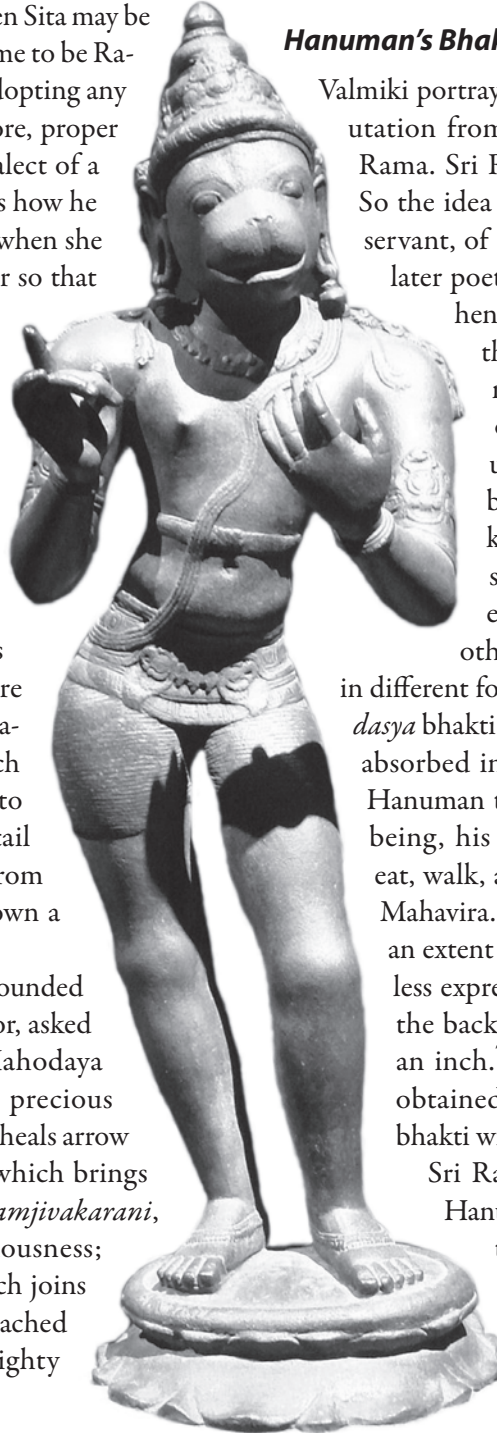
When Lakshmana was wounded in battle, Sushena, the doctor, asked Hanuman to go to the Mahodaya mountain and obtain the precious herbs *vishalyakarani*, which heals arrow wounds; *savarnakarnani*, which brings back colour to the skin; *samjivakarani*, which brings back consciousness; and *samadhanakarani*, which joins broken bones. Hanuman reached the mountain with one mighty

leap, but could not identify the particular herbs. So he lifted the entire mountain and leaped back to where Rama was. Everyone present, including the gods, were dumbstruck at this unusual feat.

### Hanuman's Bhakti

Valmiki portrays Hanuman as one on deputation from Sugriva to his friend Sri Rama. Sri Rama also treats him thus. So the idea that Hanuman was a *dasa*, servant, of Sri Rama is an addition by later poets, which has been comprehensively taken up throughout the country. Mahavira Hanuman thus became the ideal of *dasya bhava*, the spiritual attitude of servant, in bhakti literature. Sri Ramakrishna, after his stupendous sadhana and realizations, experimented with various other practices to realize God in different forms. To attain perfection in *dasya bhakti* Sri Ramakrishna became so absorbed in the thought of Mahavira Hanuman that he forgot, for the time being, his individuality. He used to eat, walk, and do all other things like Mahavira. The intensity grew to such an extent that his eyes took on a restless expression and the lower end of the backbone lengthened by about an inch.<sup>7</sup> Finally, Sri Ramakrishna obtained the culmination of *dasya bhakti* with the vision of Sita.

Sri Rama felt deeply obliged to Hanuman after he returned with the news of Sita. To express his gratitude, Sri Rama wanted to make a gift to




Standing Hanuman,  
Chola Dynasty, 11th century

Hanuman, but he himself was in exile and had no resources. So he said: 'I am sorry that I cannot reward him properly for this act. Now only a friendly embrace is all that I can give and with delight I give him that.'<sup>8</sup> Shortly after Sri Rama was crowned emperor upon his return to Ayodhya, he decided to reward all his well-wishers. At a grand ceremony at his court, all of Sri Rama's friends and allies took turns to be honoured. Seeing Hanuman approaching, an overwhelmed Sri Rama embraced him warmly and declared that he could never adequately honour or repay Hanuman for the help and services he had rendered. Sita, however, insisted that Hanuman deserved honour more than anyone else, and so she gave him a necklace of precious pearls that adorned her neck. Hanuman received it and started breaking every pearl to peer what was inside. Taken aback, many of those present demanded to know why he was destroying the precious gift. Hanuman replied saying that he wanted to ensure that Sri Rama and Sita were in the pearls, because if they were not, the necklace was useless to him. He was mocked for this reply and was asked if his own heart had Sri Rama and Sita. In response Hanuman tore his chest open and everyone was stunned to see the living images of Sri Rama and Sita inside.

Swamiji explained the stages of realization that correspond to the three philosophies of Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Advaita thus: 'Hanuman, the devotee of Rama, summed up his philosophy in these words: When I identify myself with the body, O Lord, I am Thy creature, eternally separate from Thee. When I identify myself with the soul, I am a spark of that Divine Fire which Thou art. But when I identify myself with the Atman, I and Thou art one.'<sup>9</sup>

By the divine boons he received, Mahavira Hanuman continues to live. In the Mahabharata there is an episode in which he had an encounter

with the Pandava prince Bhima, who was also born of Vayu and therefore step-brother of Mahavira. Unlike Hanuman, Bhima was proud of his strength, so to teach him a lesson in humility Hanuman took up the form of an old monkey and lay on the road. When Bhima protested, Hanuman asked him to lift his tail from the path and proceed. Bhima could not even budge it and became humiliated. He understood this was no ordinary monkey and begged pardon. Hanuman then revealed his identity and also promised to sit on the flag of Arjuna's chariot during the war. Hanuman also showed his huge form to Bhima and added that he could have destroyed the Lankan army alone, but he did not do so to glorify Sri Rama.

The tradition and belief is that wherever the deeds of Sri Rama are sung, at all such places Hanuman appears and sheds tears of devotion and joy, and at all such places his presence removes the fear of demons from the mind of devotees. Today temples dedicated to Hanuman are found all over India and also in other countries, and this deathless hero is worshipped by thousands of people. 

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# ***Sri Ramakrishna: The 'New Man' of the Age – V***

**Swami Bhajanananda**

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

## ***Universal Spirituality: Its Salient Features***

**A**S MENTIONED EARLIER, spirituality had been regarded as a part of religion till modern times. It was Sri Ramakrishna who first brought about the separation of spirituality from religion.<sup>13</sup> He taught that spirituality is the essence of every religion, and whoever follows it with purity and sincerity will be able to realize God whatever be the religion one belongs to. Swami Vivekananda gave the name 'Universal Religion' to this universal spirituality. Whatever might be its origin, the idea that spirituality can be practised without affiliation to any religion gained ground from the 1970s and, with the coming of the World Wide Web, it became established as a distinct movement. The World Wide Web is making available the spiritual treasures of all religions to people all over the world. People are beginning to discover a common ground to all the spiritual traditions of the world, and they have the freedom to choose whatever good idea they find in different traditions. In this way spirituality assumes a universal dimension and an independent status. The new spiritual movement has been named 'Secular Spirituality', 'Global Spirituality', and 'Non-religious Spirituality'.

The separation of spirituality from religion has taken place mainly in Western countries. In India there is no need for this separation because the Hindu tradition is so broad based that even an atheist can remain a Hindu. Nevertheless,

since India has a secular polity with a multi-religious population, the secular spiritual movement is a welcome development, as it can be introduced to youths and in educational institutions without being labelled as 'religious bias'. In fact, freed from the hold of prejudices and limitations of traditional religions and supported by science and technology, secular spirituality is becoming popular among the present generation of youths in the West as well as in the East. For millions of people it has become a new way of making life nobler, richer, meaningful, successful, and fulfilling. The new movement is quite similar to what Swami Vivekananda called 'Universal Religion', by which he really meant 'Universal Spirituality'.

Thus, at present two kinds of spirituality are in vogue: religious spirituality and non-religious spirituality, which is also known as Secular Spirituality, and named here as Universal Spirituality.

What are the salient features of the new Secular Spirituality? When we study these features, we can see how close some of them are to the well-known ideas of Swami Vivekananda.

(i) One noticeable feature is the shifting of the centre of spirituality from God to the human being. It is not theological questions about God that young people are now interested in but their own inner problems. They may or may not have faith in God, and their primary concern is not

realization of God but to orientate themselves to a universal life and reality. Spiritual life for the modern youth is a personal quest for meaning, for security, for love, for peace.

(ii) The second notable feature is a change in the attitude of people towards themselves. The Vedantic concept of human personality as body-mind-spirit seems to be more acceptable to the followers of modern spirituality than the Judeo-Christian concept of body-mind. It may be noted here that the idea that the spirit, known as the Atman, is different from the mind was a key concept in the Vedanta philosophy propagated in the West by Swami Vivekananda.

(iii) Another general trend is to seek a source of power within oneself. Instead of blaming God for one's misfortunes or waiting for God to bail them out of difficulties, modern youths are willing to face the difficulties of life themselves. One can see in this attitude the echo of Swami Vivekananda's exhortations, such as this: 'Therefore, stand up, be bold, be strong. Take the whole responsibility on your own shoulders, and know that you are the creator of your own destiny. All the strength and succour you want is within yourselves.'<sup>14</sup>

(iv) A positive and holistic outlook on life characterizes the present generation. Young people do not look upon spirituality as a means to escape from life, but as a means to live a richer, fuller, nobler, and meaningful life. For them spiritual life is not other-worldly but this-worldly. Good health and success in life are also motivating factors. Success is nowadays defined not merely in terms of wealth but in terms of one's total life, which includes holistic health, stress reduction, happy family life, self-actualization, and spiritual fulfilment. Spirituality itself is now being regarded as a means of attaining success in life. In the old religious tradition renunciation of wealth was insisted upon as a primary condition

for leading a spiritual life. A prominent idea in the modern secular spirituality is that wealth is not an obstacle to spirituality. One can be wealthy as well as spiritual.<sup>15</sup>

In the Hindu religious tradition there are two ways of leading a religious life known as *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*. The aim of *pravṛtti* is worldly prosperity, *abhyudaya*, whereas the aim of *nivṛtti* is *mukti*, liberation from bondage to the world, freedom from ignorance and suffering. It is clear that the modern spiritual movement, based on secular spirituality, belongs to the path of *pravṛtti*. There is nothing wrong in this, for spiritual life is meant not only for monks, nuns, and recluses but also for people who lead a family life, follow different professions, and undertake social responsibilities. Swami Vivekananda's practical Vedanta shows how basic Vedantic principles can be applied in *pravṛtti-marga* as well.

(v) Another important feature of the modern spiritual movement is its pluralistic approach to world religions, its openness to the spiritual paths of all religions. The spiritual truths of all religions are now available to all people through multimedia channels. People belonging to different religions can now see for themselves the similarities and the common ground among all spiritual paths and can adopt in their lives those ideas that suit their temperaments and aspirations. In this way Sri Ramakrishna's doctrine that religions are different pathways to the same ultimate goal has become an essential aspect of modern spirituality.

(vi) Youths of the present generation do not want their souls to be imprisoned by the walls of religious institutions. Religious life may need identification with a denomination or institution, but spiritual life is a personal quest in the depths of one's consciousness. It is, in the words of the famous mathematician and philosopher A N Whitehead, 'what an individual does with

his solitude'. Every person has his own distinct way of thinking, feeling, and willing, his own temperament, his own drawbacks, all of which together constitute his inner nature, his own 'law of being'. His spiritual life will be meaningful and fruitful only if it is lived in accordance with his own inner 'law of being'. What this fact implies is, according to Swami Vivekananda, that each person has his own personal religion. Swamiji said: 'No one form of religion will do for all. ... No man is born into any religion; he has a religion in his own soul. Any system which seeks to destroy individuality is in the long run disastrous. Each life has a current running through it, and this current will eventually take it to God.'<sup>16</sup> These are great ideas that perfectly express the needs and aspirations of the present and future generations of youths. But unfortunately these noble ideas are not known or appreciated widely.

(vii) Finally, we come to a basic idea animating the modern secular spiritual movement: spirituality is not only a personal quest but also a matter of direct experience. Modern people are not satisfied with mere faith in scriptures or religious dogmas. They want to enrich their lives with spiritual experiences. We may here say that it was Sri Ramakrishna who in the middle of the nineteenth century propounded the idea that the test and criterion of the validity of religion and spiritual truths is direct transcendental experience. Swami Vivekananda popularized this idea in the West. The experience aimed for by the followers of secular spirituality may not be the higher transcendental experience described by Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and the mystics of all religions. What the present generation seeks is a personal encounter with Reality in all its dimensions—from ordinary day-to-day life to the highest mystic experience. For the present-day spiritual seekers any experience that transforms one's life inwardly and gives

a higher understanding of Reality is a spiritual experience. Says the noted New Age author Paul Heelas: 'An idea or practice is "spiritual" when it reveals our personal desire to establish a felt-relationship with the deepest meaning or powers governing life.'<sup>17</sup>

(viii) Apart from the salient features discussed above, the modern secular spiritual movement also concerns itself with environmental protection, gender equality, cyber culture, and other matters.

### ***Drawbacks of Modern Secular Spirituality***

We have discussed above the positive points of the ongoing secular spiritual movement. It is, however, necessary to point out here that this spiritual movement has some drawbacks as well.

One obvious drawback is the absence of an overall, integral philosophy of life. The present secular spiritual movement depends upon many spiritual ideas, philosophical concepts, academic studies, research findings, and experiences claimed by its followers, all of which is so diverse that, without an all-inclusive, integrating philosophy of life the movement lacks correct direction and coherence and may be the cause of much confusion in the minds of people. Without an overarching correct view of life and reality individual life may also be easily misled by wrong ideas and false claims of spiritual experience.

Such an integral philosophy of life should be based on the spiritual experiences of ancient sages as well as the research findings of modern science, should include the ideals of the West and the East, should appeal to the temperaments of different types of people, and should be adaptable to changing circumstances. Universal spirituality needs a universal philosophy. We believe that the Vedanta philosophy, as lived by Sri Ramakrishna and interpreted by Swami



Vivekananda, can to a great extent fulfil the need for such universal philosophy.

The second drawback is that the modern spiritual movement lacks a strong moral and ethical foundation. Without a strong moral foundation, individual spiritual life as well as social life degenerates. This does not, however, mean that one has to be a monk or nun to be spiritual. Spirituality is possible for all without any distinctions of caste, creed, or race, and for both monks and lay people. But it should be supported by moral values, both personal and social. Modern youths do not want a morality based on convention, compulsion, or fear—fear of God or authority. This calls for a new moral philosophy or system of ethics based on inherent purity, goodness, and divinity of the soul. Swami Vivekananda has laid the foundation for such a universal moral philosophy.

Another drawback in the modern secular spiritual movement is that it does not help to raise women's dignity in society. A comprehensive philosophy for the spiritual movement must provide an ontological justification for giving a higher status to womanhood. The real glory of womanhood is motherhood. The fact that maternal love and care is not restricted to the human species alone but is shared by other higher species as well shows that motherhood is a universal, divine trait and function. Sri Ramakrishna's worship of God as the Divine Mother of the universe and his looking upon all women as manifestations of the Divine Mother raises the dignity of women and sublimates man's attitude towards them.

Yet another drawback of the present-day secular spiritual movement is a lack of clear understanding of genuine spiritual experience. For many people who regard themselves as spiritual any good feeling is a spiritual experience. Some people have a vivid imagination, which they mistake for spiritual experience. Truly speaking, only transcendental experiences, *atīndriya anubhūti*,

are genuine spiritual experiences. But only very few people ever achieve these higher experiences.

Human experiences are of two kinds: transcendental and empirical. Transcendental experiences begin with the awakening of the *pratyagatman*, individual self, and culminate in the realization of God as personal, *saguna*, or impersonal, *nirguna*. Empirical experiences are those gained through the five sense organs or through the mind. There are many spiritual *samskaras* lying buried in the unconscious depths of the mind. Through prayer, meditation, *japa*, and other spiritual disciplines some of these latent impressions become activated and give rise to a kind of spiritual experience. Such experiences are good and may be helpful, but they should be distinguished from genuine transcendental spiritual experiences, which are attained only through a long period of purification, inner struggle, and divine grace.

In the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples one can see the full glory of the spiritual life, and from their experiences and teachings we can understand what genuine spiritual experiences are.

### ***Dawn of the Golden Age***

***Power of Religion and Spirituality*** • Why have we discussed in detail the modern spiritual movement in this series of articles on the avatara-hood of Sri Ramakrishna? The reason is that spirituality—religious spirituality as well as secular spirituality—has already begun to play a significant role in the lives of millions of people all over the world. And there are evidences to indicate that in the future spirituality is going to play a dominant role, transforming human consciousness into divine consciousness and human life into divine life. About this future role of spirituality Swami Vivekananda said more than a hundred years ago:

It is sometimes said that religions are dying out, that spiritual ideas are dying out in the world. To me it seems that they have just begun to grow. The power of religion, broadened and purified, is going to penetrate every part of human life. So long as religion was in the hands of a chosen few or of a body of priests, it was in temples, churches, books, dogmas, ceremonials, forms, and rituals. But when we come to the real, spiritual, universal concept, then, and then alone, will religion become real and living; it will come into our very nature, live in our every movement, penetrate every pore of our society, and be infinitely more a power for good than it has ever been before.<sup>18</sup>

Twenty five years later, almost echoing Swamiji, the famous British writer H G Wells wrote towards the end of his brilliant work *The Outline of History*:

But, out of the trouble and tragedy of these times and the confusion before us, there may emerge a moral and intellectual revival, a religious revival, of a simplicity and scope to draw together men of alien races and now discreet traditions into one common and sustained way of living for the world's service. ... Religious emotion—stripped of corruptions and freed from its last priestly entanglements—may presently blow through life again like a great wind, bursting the doors and flinging open the shutters of the individual life, and making many things possible and easy that in these present days of exhaustion seem almost too difficult to desire.<sup>19</sup>

*Sri Ramakrishna and the Satya Yuga* • In the introductory section of this series of articles it was mentioned that in ancient India and Greece the progression of history was believed

Dakshineswar  
Temple,  
Calcutta, 1865



to take place in cycles of four ages or yugas: Satya, Golden; Treta, Silver; Dvapara, Bronze; and Kali, Iron. According to Swami Vivekananda, one such cycle has just come to an end. And, with the advent of Sri Ramakrishna, a new Satya Yuga has begun. He mentioned this view in several of his letters to his monastic brothers: 'From the date the Ramakrishna Incarnation was born, has sprung the Satya-Yuga.'<sup>20</sup>

Swamiji's concept of Satya Yuga is, however, different from the popular conception of it. We have seen that the so-called secular spirituality, which is coming up in many parts of the world, including India, has several drawbacks. Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda have brought about a thorough purification of spirituality, although their work in this field is yet to become widely known in the other parts of the world. With the dawn of the Golden Age the spiritual stream will run clear. Swamiji conceived the Golden Age as the culmination of the spiritual evolution of the collective human mind. This leads to Swamiji's theory of evolution.

### **Spiritual Evolution**

According to modern science, the human species, *Homo sapiens*, is the result of millions of years of evolution. This raises the question: what is the line for further evolution of human beings? Julian Huxley, the noted British biologist of the twentieth century, held the view that further evolution of human beings is psychosocial, and not merely physical as in the case of animals and plants.<sup>21</sup> Long before Huxley, Swami Vivekananda had thought about psychosocial evolution; but according to him, it is something that has been going on for several thousand years. Now, however, humanity has reached the threshold of a new stage of evolution, the collective emergence of the Spirit. Psychosocial evolution is only a preparation for

the spiritual evolution of humanity. And this leap into the highest stage of evolution is effected through yoga.

In his introduction to his work *Raja Yoga*, Swamiji speaks of human evolution as the ascent from the unconscious to the conscious and thence to the superconscious. At the unconscious level life manifests itself as *instincts*; at the conscious level life manifests itself as *reason*; and at the superconscious level life manifests itself as *superconscious awareness*. Furthermore, at the unconscious level there is no sense of egoism; it is at the conscious level that the ego manifests itself; but at the superconscious level again there is no sense of egoism.<sup>22</sup> The point Swamiji makes here is that at the superconscious level the human being is liberated from the limitations of the ego; his individual consciousness becomes one with the infinite consciousness of Brahman or God, and he sees God in all people. This generates universal love for all, and the liberated individual serves all people as the Divine.

One more point is to be noted here about Swami Vivekananda's theory of the spiritual evolution of humankind. The term 'spiritual evolution' does not imply that the Spirit, known as Atman, undergoes any change or evolution. Atman is immutable, unchanging, beginningless, and endless. All transformations and changes take place in Prakriti and, in the case of the human being, in the mind. The mind is like a dark screen covering a source of light, which stands for the Atman. Through a small hole in the screen a little light comes out, and as the hole becomes larger, more and more light manifests itself. In the same way, as ignorance in the mind is progressively removed, the Atman manifests itself more and more as superconscious knowledge.<sup>23</sup>

The twofold process of the removal of ignorance and the manifestation of the inherent

divinity of the soul is what is meant by yoga, according to Swami Vivekananda. There are four yogas—jnana, bhakti, dhyana, and karma—which are four ways of manifesting the inherent divinity. In other words, yoga is the process of transforming human consciousness into divine consciousness.

The key element in this inner transformation is intensity, which Sri Ramakrishna called *vyākulatā*, intense longing. Ordinary evolution is a very slow process; yoga is a process of speeding up, accelerating evolution. Yoga is spiritual revolution.<sup>24</sup>

According to Swamiji, Darwin's idea of struggle for existence as the main driving force in evolution applies only to the level of animals. At the human level the only struggle is the inner struggle for consciousness. Struggle for existence, which means competition or even fighting with others, becomes an obstacle in the spiritual evolution of the human being. What helps in spiritual evolution is not competition but co-operation, love, compassion, knowledge, and other virtues.

What we have discussed above constitutes Swami Vivekananda's theory of the spiritual evolution of humanity. In support of Swamiji's theory we may cite the theories of evolution propounded by Sri Aurobindo, the great mystic and thinker, and Teilhard de Chardin, the Jesuit thinker and palaeontologist.<sup>25</sup>

(To be concluded)

## Notes and References

13. This was pointed out many years ago by Arthur Osborne, the well-known biographer and follower of Sri Ramana Maharshi. See Arthur Osborne, *Be Still: It Is the Wind that Sings* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanashramam, 2000), 37.
14. *Complete Works*, 2.225.
15. See Vikas Malkani, *The Yoga of Wealth* (Singapore: Times Edition, Marshall Cavendish, 2004).
16. *Complete Works*, 6.82.
17. Paul Heelas, *The New Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 60.
18. *Complete Works*, 2.68.
19. H G Wells, *The Outline of History* (London: Cassell, 1921), 602–3.
20. *Complete Works*, 6.327–8; see also 6.318, 335.
21. Cf. Julian Huxley, *Evolution: The Modern Synthesis* (London: George Allen Unwin, 1945).
22. Cf. *Complete Works*, 1.180, 184.
23. See *Complete Works*, 1.420, 2.81, 3.239, 6.24.
24. See *Complete Works*, 1.157.
25. Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution, elaborated in his magnum opus *Life Divine*, holds that evolution is actually the unfolding of consciousness from its involvement in matter, then from its involvement in life, and then from its involvement in mind. Human evolution has passed through the stages of matter, life, and mind. The next stage is supramental, by which the limited individual consciousness is liberated and becomes one with supreme divine consciousness. This ascent and liberation are effected through yoga. Sri Aurobindo, however, differs from all others in holding that the supramental transformation also involves the 'descent' of the Supermind into the body leading to the divinization of the body. According to Teilhard de Chardin, the universe consists of three layers: the lithosphere or matter, biosphere or life, and noosphere or mind. The human mind is a part of the noosphere. The noosphere, by a process of 'complexification', culminates in the Omega Point, which is the ultimate goal of humankind. For Teilhard evolution is a gradual progression from simpler to more and more complex organism. He conceived the Omega Point as the Cosmic Person, whom he identified with Christ. Human mind is now limited by the ego, but at the Omega Point all egos merge into the Cosmic Person—cf. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (London: Collins, 1960). Thus, according to Swamiji, Sri Aurobindo, and Pierre Teilhard, at the ultimate point in human evolution human consciousness is freed from its limitations and becomes one with the supreme Spirit.



# Holy Mother's Concern for Common Persons

**Swami Tathagatananda**

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

**T**HERE ARE numberless illustrations of the Mother's compassion for degenerate and self-indulgent people. Her effusive sympathy and love did not exclude theatrical performers, women who lacked moral principles, and others of low social strata in their community. When some intimate devotees of Sri Ramakrishna showed that they did not approve of the way she expressed her loving concern to such undesirable characters, she remarked: 'Everybody can be the mother of the good, but who will accept these dregs of society and console them? I am the mother of the wicked as well as the mother of the good.'<sup>24</sup> This was the constant matchless state of her mind and heart.

## ***Compassion for the Incurrable***

Holy Mother acknowledged that she came to demonstrate the all-embracing divine compassion: 'It's for this that we came. If we don't take over the sins and sufferings, and don't digest them, who else will?'<sup>25</sup> Sometimes people with odd ideas and reckless behaviour came to see Holy Mother. They would approach her or even force themselves into her room. Some of them had queer demands they wanted to fulfil and strange ideas they desired to act out in the name of their so-called devotion to Mother as a deity. Holy Mother was never cold or indifferent to these spiritual aspirants. She was always forbearing and accepted them as little children seeking attention from their mother. She naturally

overlooked others' faults and lack of consideration and humility.

Once a woman was taking leave of Holy Mother. She told the Mother that she would make sure that she remembered her and then proceeded to sink her teeth into the Mother's big toe. This pained Holy Mother considerably, but she did not accuse the woman of any indiscretion. The blessed Mother simply remarked: 'I never saw such a device for making one remember' (381). Another devotee with a similar motive for making his visit a memorable one banged his head on her toe when he prostrated before her. When he was asked why he did it, he said: 'By thus saluting the Mother I leave her with some pain in the feet, and she will remember me as long as the pain is there' (382).

One day, when Holy Mother was in Jayram-bati, a young man saluted her while she was standing. Suddenly, he grabbed her feet in an impetuous impulse and pulled them towards his chest. The Mother narrowly escaped falling to the ground (ibid.).

In another instance a careless lad requested Holy Mother to preserve some rice from her own plate, dry it out, and give it to him to take home as her special prasada for him. She pointed to some rice in a brass plate and told him that it was meant for him. He decided to put it in a sunny spot to dry. The Mother warned him to remain by the plate to keep away the crows. He did this for a little while, but left his post

for a quick smoke. He soon became distracted while he was away, completely forgot about the rice, and fell asleep. He awoke hours later to find Holy Mother keeping vigil over the rice prasad.<sup>26</sup>

There are also accounts about other impatient devotees demanding to see Holy Mother immediately upon their arrival. When the Mother was told of their arrival, they usually had a ready excuse for not waiting to be called at the appropriate time. Despite their complete lack of consideration, Holy Mother always set aside her duties and tended to their needs (380–1).

She once confided to someone: ‘Several among those who come here are up to anything in life. No type of sin has been left undone by them. But when they come here and address me as “Mother”, I forget everything and they get more than they deserve.’<sup>27</sup> Others considered these types of incorrigible devotees to be like thorns in the Mother’s flesh, but all she expressed was her feeling of love for them.

Holy Mother showed her divine compassion in many ways. One time she was walking with a lantern late at night and picking up small stones from the ground. She gathered them one by one into a corner of her sari, presumably to deposit them somewhere else. A close devotee accidentally observed her odd activity and approached her to ask what she was doing. The Mother’s simple explanation was: ‘The stones are sharp. When people walk along this path, these chips will prick their feet and cause them pain. That is why I am picking them up.’<sup>28</sup> Seeing the depth of the Mother’s feeling for others, and wanting to relieve her of yet another physical demand on her health and well-being, that devotee asked the Mother to retire to her room and allow him to do it.

Holy Mother was divine—she lived, moved, and had her being in the Divine and the Divine alone. Invariably, to read her enigmatic life story is to discover that she was the living embodiment

of Vedanta. One particularly beautiful illustration shows the infinite love of God that poured out freely from her heart. At Dakshineswar it was her joyful privilege to bring Sri Ramakrishna’s food to his room. One day Holy Mother was taking the Master’s food to him. She had reached the veranda outside the Master’s room. Suddenly, an immoral woman devotee appeared and took the plate from the Mother’s hands saying: ‘Give it to me, Mother, give it to me!’ She carried it to Sri Ramakrishna and left as suddenly as she had come.

It is well known by devotees that Sri Ramakrishna was unable to touch any food defiled by an immoral person, and this time as well he did not take the food. Holy Mother was sitting near him during this incident. Gently, he reprimanded her for spoiling his meal by handing it over to the woman. The Master tried to extract a promise from Holy Mother that she would always bring the food to him herself.

Holy Mother was perfect in obedience to the Master, but on this occasion her spontaneous response startled Sri Ramakrishna: ‘That I cannot Master! I shall certainly bring your food myself, but if anyone begs me by calling me “Mother”, I shan’t be able to contain myself. Besides, you are not my Master alone, you are for all’ (85). The words flowed sweetly from her heart. The Master felt immense joy at this sure sign of universal motherly affection flowering in her.

After the Master’s passing, when Holy Mother was established in her own house—the Udbodhan in Calcutta—devotees would come throughout the day to the Mother. The Master’s devotee Golap-Ma was the Mother’s constant companion. She was angered to see Holy Mother without a regular schedule of rest and was upset over the many difficulties that naturally occurred in the household because of the Mother’s self-sacrifice. ‘What’s this that has come upon you

Mother?’ she said. ‘You put forward your feet to anyone who approaches you and calls you Mother!’ The Mother replied: ‘How can I help it, Golap? I can’t contain myself when one draws near me and calls me Mother’ (366).

### ***Motherly Firmness***

We should not think that Holy Mother was always sweet and pleasant with others. The pitcher of Holy Mother’s boundless bliss also contained a few stinging drops of righteous indignation. Whenever anyone violated the code of ethics at the monastery, she would ask them to find their own food and live outside the monastery. She subdued her kind, soft, and liberal outlook when any grave injustice or serious human weakness confronted her. These painful occasions elicited a few stern corrective words of wisdom from the Mother that were effective and transformed the situation.

The wife and the sister of Deven Babu had the same name, Sindhubala. This caused some confusion and a terrible episode in the life of his sister. Deven Babu was under suspicion of revolutionary activity in his native village of Juthabihara in Bankura. The police were seeking to arrest his wife for interrogation. It so happened that they mistakenly arrested his sister, who was pregnant with child, in the nearby village of Sabajpur, where she lived with her husband. They also arrested Deven Babu’s wife and had forced them both to walk the entire way to the police station. The villagers’ protests and appeals for some sort of transport for these two women had no effect on the cold-hearted officers.

When the news of this cruel treatment reached the Mother’s ears, she was very agitated. Her whole body began to shake and her face flushed with righteous indignation: ‘Is this an order of the Company (Government) or an overzealous act on the part of the police? We

never heard of such inhuman treatment towards innocent women in the reign of Queen Victoria. If this is an order from the Company, then it will be doomed soon. Was there no man there who could give them some slaps and snatch away the girls?’ Soon after this they were released. When the Mother was told, she confessed that she could not have slept that night had the women not been released from their suffering at the hands of the police.<sup>29</sup>

Girishchandra Ghosh often used his skills in logic and debate to bring others round to his opinions. His poetically embellished arguments usually convinced ordinary people. One day he was with the Mother at Jayrambati. His bitter experiences made him feel that the way to escape more unhappiness in life was to renounce the world altogether. Convinced that he should become a sannyasin, he applied all his skills to convince the Mother that this was a correct decision on his part. The Mother knew that he should not enter upon a life of renunciation and rejected each of his arguments. ‘No!’ she said firmly and decisively to each of his brilliant arguments. In the end, he could not persuade the Mother and gave up the idea entirely (218–19).

In 1916 the Ramakrishna Order faced a sinister crisis. It happened that some of the monastic members had formerly been political revolutionaries dedicated to winning India’s political freedom. After taking the vow of sannyasa they sincerely gave up their revolutionary involvement and completely eschewed the path of politics. Nonetheless, on 11 December 1916 Lord Carmichael, the governor of Bengal, issued a formal statement of injurious charges against the Mission that were decidedly unfriendly.

It was a crucial time in India’s history. The Mission’s devotees and well-wishers feared dangerous consequences to the Mission. To avoid such danger they suggested to the Mission

authorities that they eliminate the former revolutionaries from the Order. The Mission authorities turned to Holy Mother for advice and Swami Saradananda, the current secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission, presented the matter to her. Notwithstanding the unfavourable official remarks of the government, she firmly and unequivocally rejected the idea of eliminating those monks from the Order, since they had joined the Order in the name of Sri Ramakrishna. Holy Mother said they should remain and gave her own suggestion as a solution: allow Swami Saradananda to meet personally with Lord Carmichael and explain the high principles of the Mission to him.<sup>30</sup> Swami Saradananda met with the governor's private secretary, with the result that the governor fully exonerated the Mission and its members in his subsequent formal written statement of 26 March 1917.<sup>31</sup>

### ***Mother of All***

Animals and ordinary objects equally received Holy Mother's loving concern. Whether it was a plant or a creature of the earth, Holy Mother encompassed it within the endless bounty of her love. Having seen the Master's love for all forms, she also strongly advised against the rough handling of the common objects that householders use. These apparently insignificant tools are often neglected or carelessly treated because they are taken for granted.

The Mother was attached to the sweet calling of two calves that passed by her house nearly every day; occasionally, when they did not appear, she worried about their safety. She also took great pains to look after a cow that had been purchased by a devotee to provide her with milk when she was living in Jayrambati. This cow had a calf. One day she heard the calf bleating loudly for a long time, as if it were in pain. No one in the Mother's household could figure out what

was ailing the animal. Some local remedies that were applied to the calf gave it no relief. Its helpless bleating brought her, filled with concern, to the creature's side. She sat alongside the calf and embraced it in her arms. Like a mother with a colicky baby, she gently massaged and patted its navel until it stopped bleating and was breathing peacefully by her side.<sup>32</sup>

At Jayrambati Holy Mother's niece Radhu was caring for a cat and its litter. The Mother gave this cat half a pound of milk every day; naturally, it was attracted to the Mother and felt safe around her. The cat and its litter thrived under her loving attention but were not liked by one brahmacharin who abused them occasionally. One day he picked up the mother cat roughly and threw her across the room. Holy Mother painfully witnessed his action, which made her face turn pale. She told him: 'Look here, Jnan [Swami Jnanananda], don't beat the cats, for even in them am I.' Holy Mother's words had a wonderful effect on him. To his amazement and joy, from that day forward he felt no repugnance or violent inclination towards the cats. He saw to it that they were given fish to eat on a regular basis, even though he strictly followed a vegetarian diet. The Mother's infinite love also lessened the power of his food prejudice (362–3). Thus, the cat that took refuge in the Mother became the instrument to enlighten a future monk of the Order.

As a brahmacharin, Swami Jnanananda received much affection from Holy Mother. Once he had a pervasive itching rash. The pain was so severe that it prevented him from eating with his own hand. The Mother mixed rice and curries for him and fed him slowly with her own hand (339).

Holy Mother had a talking myna—starling—at home, which she called Gangaram. Every day she would bathe the bird as carefully as she would her own child. Speaking affectionately to it, she spread out each of its shiny



feathers to inspect them for parasites. Every now and then it would warble with pleasure. Leaving the bird to add its own final touch by pruning its feathers with its strong beak, she would then clean its cage.

Holy Mother liked to carry the bird around with her in its cage whenever she could. Hearing many words and names as Holy Mother spoke with others, the bird quickly learned to recite the names of the brahmacharins. Occasionally, she would say: 'Dear Gangaram, do talk!' The bird would then recite: 'Hare Krishna, Hare Rama, Krishna Krishna, Rama Rama.' Mynas have a

piercing loud voice. Sometimes it would shriek: 'Mother, O Mother!' Regardless of this intrusion on her peaceful state of mind, her response was always sweet and tender: 'Here I am, my son, here I am.' Then she would give it a treat of gram and water (377).

One day at Jayrambati a woman roughly discarded a broom in a corner after its usefulness in cleaning the courtyard. Even the homely broom made of stiff twigs and fibres received the grace of Holy Mother's loving defence. Using it as an example, she imparted a great teaching to the wielder of the broom. She gently explained to



*Standing, from left to right:  
Br. Ganendranath, Ashutosh;  
sitting, from left to right:  
Nalini, Holy Mother, Radhu,  
Lakshmi*

her that the broom must be respected, not neglected (483).

In addition, she gave a wonderful teaching to the woman that she herself always followed: 'The smallest work should be done with the proper attention; every object, even a broom, should be maintained carefully, and nothing should be neglected as of little consequence' (ibid.). In Holy Mother love, wisdom, kindness, and the common weal were always unified through her actions and intentions for the well-being of others.

There is another instance of the Mother's living intentionally in her divine consciousness. Holy Mother made an example of a simple household activity. Once someone brought her a basket of fruits. When it was empty of its contents, it was thrown away thoughtlessly. The Mother noticed this and finding the basket still serviceable had it brought, washed, and kept for some future use (483). She explained her principle in this way: 'Each should have his due. What men can eat shouldn't be wasted on cattle; what cattle can eat shouldn't be thrown away to dogs; what cattle and dogs can't eat can be thrown into ponds for the fish—nothing should be wasted' (484).

It was not because she was poor that the Mother lived austerely; she was the embodiment of purity and possessed the virtue of *aparigraha*, not receiving gifts from others. To live harmoniously with nature with the least possible waste of its resources filled her with joy. On this point of integrity she followed the Master's instructions to her exactly; she never accepted gifts of money or material objects from others.

The Mother was equally oblivious to the seeming differences between comfort and the lack of comfort—a hard pillow made of the discarded fibres of raw jute was as serviceable as a soft pillow. She lived simply with a calm, balanced attitude towards everyone and everything under all circumstances.

### **Eternal Mother**

Many persons received the benefits of Holy Mother's loving concern and ministrations directly from her. Countless other souls continue to receive the benefits of her love long after her passing from this world. Above all, Holy Mother's words remain with us always. We are near to her when we read about her life. Many of her sweet words have been recorded for posterity. Reading them gives us strength and the hope of her immortal blessings. The thoughts and ideas she expressed with artless simplicity belong to everyone. Her words are ours to ponder, ours to be consoled and encouraged by, ours to emulate with devotion and faith. In this respect, she is eternally accessible to anyone who reads her life story and teachings. Some receive Holy Mother's love purely by her grace. Five days before her passing, Holy Mother spoke her last words from her deathbed to an inconsolable woman devotee. Her merciful and infinite compassion to that one devotee simply known as 'Annapurna's mother' is meant for all: 'But one thing I tell you—if you want peace, my daughter, don't find fault with others, but find fault rather with yourself. Learn to make the world your own. Nobody is a stranger, my dear; the world is yours' (519).

Holy Mother was a blossom silently thriving and blooming in darkness, quietly emanating its pure, delicate fragrance into the world's atmosphere. She is a rarefied gift from the Divine to humanity. In her we find the highest expression of two divine qualities from the ancient Indian culture that worships God as mother: the eternal and the feminine. She is the embodiment of immaculate purity, modesty, simplicity, nobility, dignity, loving service, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, selflessness, compassion, self-abnegation, and all the high qualities of eternal womanhood. She is a manifestation of divine love.


We mortals have always noted the sublime advent of divine incarnations with awe. The mysterious power of the Divine, appearing in the humblest circumstances, profoundly arouses and transforms ordinary human beings. Holy Mother's inner radiance of pure consciousness was hidden under the veil of simplicity. She is not easily recognized. One of her earliest biographers writes:

It was not easy to recognize the Mother, behind her rural simplicity, lack of modern culture, and absence of pelf and power. Shri Ramakrishna himself knew that the modern world, rolling in wealth and steeped in enjoyment, could not easily appreciate a character that was made up of the purest material and had nothing of the flash and flourish which appeal to a modern mind; and hence he spoke about the Mother in fun, 'She is a cat under ashes'. As the true colour of a cat covered with ashes escapes the notice of a careless observer, so also does the true stature of the Holy Mother elude the ken of ordinary men (115).

Holy Mother spoke the truth sweetly and in the language of divine love. Throughout her exalted life, she glorified the qualities necessary for spiritual life. Unperceptively she continues transforming, enlightening, and bringing peace to all who seek her.

To my humble mind, the world has never before witnessed a holy personality adored so universally and equally by the most scholarly and the most humble persons. Swami Virajananda once exclaimed: 'She is the mother of my innumerable past incarnations—the mother through eternal time—the Mother of my very Being.'<sup>33</sup> Is it not a marvel, nay, a miracle in human history, that the Eternal Mother appeared in human form? Those were extremely fortunate who saw the living exemplar of the feminine form of the personal God before their eyes and witnessed the

loving motherhood of the Divine. The intrinsic glory and greatness of her life, her natural gifts, and her innate perfection make us adore her as Holy Mother. Human life mirroring the Absolute: that was Sri Sarada Devi. She is an enigma; the world has never seen anyone like her. Rarely in the record of religious biography do we come across such a high manifestation of divinity as in her. Her divine life reads almost like a legend belonging to the realm of mythology.

Holy Mother's legacy to humanity of the motherhood of God has a great impact on all of us and creates a deep inner conviction about the love of God. In some minds it will certainly create the desire to emulate, even in part, her noble example of loving service and of making others peaceful. Her total lack of human weakness and untiring succour to the needy and distressed casts a spell on our minds. In a selfish and cruel world her exalted life of self-sacrifice establishes a peaceful inner haven that gives us a foretaste of heavenly bliss. Thinking of her with love and reverence makes our mind purer. May readers be inspired to read about her life more deeply for the eternal benefit of their spiritual enrichment. 

## References

24. *Sri Sri Mayer Katha* (Kolkata: Udbodhan, 2003), 161.
25. *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, 401.
26. See *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, 380.
27. *Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother*, 166.
28. Ramananda Bandyopadhyay, 'Srirupini', *Shatarupe Sarada*, 402.
29. *Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother*, 258–9.
30. See Swami Abjajananda, 'Sri Sri Ma: Sevak Chatushtayer Drishtite', *Shatarupe Sarada*, 71.
31. See Swami Gambhirananda, *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1957), 218.
32. See *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, 376–7.
33. *Sri Sarada Devi, the Great Wonder*, 124.

# Vivekananda and His Seafaring Vessels

Somenath Mukherjee

(Continued from the previous issue)

## The Prinz Regent Luitpold

ON 22 SEPTEMBER 1894 the *New York Times* wrote:

Two new and fast steamers, which will ply from Bremen to Asia and Australia, have been added to the fleet of the North German Lloyd Steamship Company of Bremen. They are named, respectively, Prinz Regent Luitpold and Prinz Heinrich, and are sister ships. They were built by F Schichau in Danzig, Germany.

They are twin-screw steamers of 7,000 tons and 6,000 horse power engines, with a speed of 15 knots. The engines of each vessel consists of two-cylinder compound engines, built on a new system, which was first introduced by the builder in the Austrian iron-clad Tegathoff, by which there is no vibration or noise when they are going at full speed.

The passenger accommodations are of the best. The first and second cabins are on the upper deck, the first cabin being forward, and the second cabin aft of the engine hatch. The passenger rooms are unusually large and well ventilated by large portholes, and in bad weather by patent ventilators, and on the inside by a wide gangway and skylights.

The staterooms are fitted with extending berths. The saloons are arranged in the modern English style. The saloons and social halls for first cabin passengers are forward of the engines on the promenade deck. The dining saloon opens on three sides, and is lighted and ventilated by twenty large windows and a mosaic glass dome skylight. Connected with the first cabin is a promenade deck 200 feet long and protected by a shelter deck.

Special attention has been paid to the second cabin. The dining saloon, which accommodates eighty passengers, the ladies cabin, and the smoking room, are in deckhouse under the poop. For third-class passengers there are 1,000 berths, and several special compartments accommodate from two to twelve persons additional.

The Prinz Regent Luitpold left Bremen on her maiden trip [on] Aug. 29.<sup>52</sup>

Before we look for more details on the *Prinz Regent Luitpold*, the profile of the company that owned her would be of relevance.<sup>53</sup> Norddeutsche Lloyd or North German Lloyd (NDL) was a German shipping company founded on 20 February 1857 by Hermann Henrich Meier and Eduard Crüsemann when the Ocean Steam Navigation Company, a joint German-American enterprise, went into dissolution. In between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century NDL became one of the most important German shipping companies. Much later, on 1 September 1870, it was merged with the Hamburg American Line, and eventually the Hapag-Lloyd was formed.

The *Prinz Regent Luitpold*,<sup>54</sup> a twin screw vessel with one funnel, had a length of 455.3 feet with 50.2 feet width and was built as an imperial mail steamer. The ship had one chimney with two masts and could accommodate 224 first-class, 101 second-class, and 850 third-class, or steerage, passengers. In September 1899 an additional deck was added to her in the newly constructed dry



dock at Lloyd Werft Bremerhaven. The little history of the ship has it that in her maiden voyage on 29 August 1894 the *Luitpold* had sailed from Bremen to Australia via Suez. On 1 May 1897 she made her first Bremen-New York voyage and continued the same route till December 1900. In May 1904 she began her Bremen-Suez-Far East route. When her Australian Voyage ended in 1910, she was used in the Far East services. At the advent of the First World War, in August 1914, the *Luitpold* was interned in Italy. Later, when Italy joined the war, she was seized by the Italian government, renamed *Pietro Calvi*, and sailed with the Italian flag. In 1928 the ship was scrapped.

### The Journey

An account of the voyage is available in what Vivekananda wrote to Mary Hale aboard the ship on 3 January 1897: 'We are nearing Port Said after four days of frightfully bad sailing from Naples. The ship is rolling as hard as she can, and you must pardon my scrawls under such circumstances. From Suez begins Asia. Once more Asia. What am I? Asiatic, European, or American? I feel a curious medley of personalities in me. ... I land in a few days at Colombo.'<sup>55</sup>

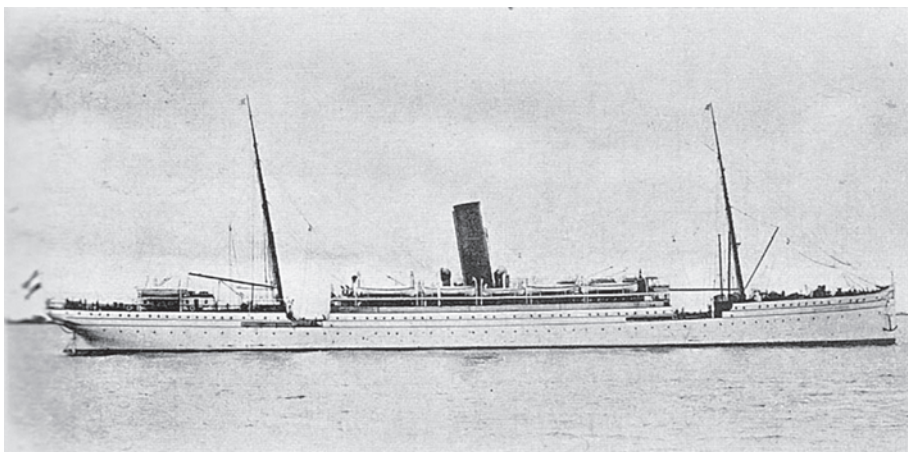
A few incidents before the *Luitpold* reached Ceylon merit mention. One was a dream that the swami had while the ship was approaching Port Said. Sister Nivedita, to whom the swami

later narrated his experience, writes: 'During his travels in Catholic Europe, he had been startled, like others before him, to find the identity of Christianity with Hinduism in a thousand points of familiar detail.'<sup>56</sup> Continuing with occasions when the swami found clear and illustrative proof consolidating his notion, Nivedita added: 'At last, he was really at home. Henceforth he could not believe that Christianity was foreign' (230). Nivedita, before narrating the dream, gave two more valid pieces of information that help us understand the dream:

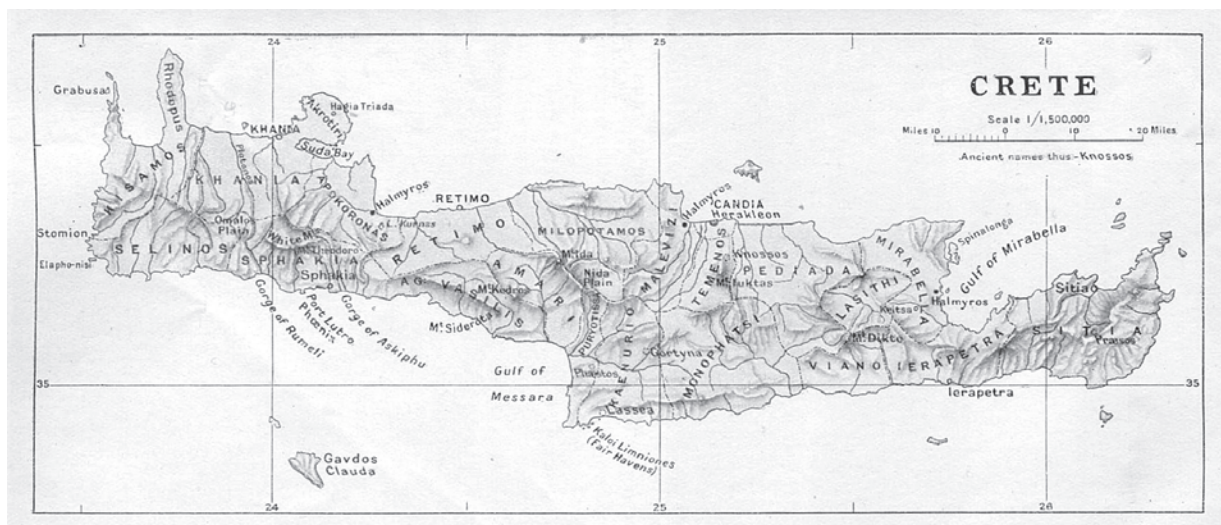
Another train of thought that may have prepared him, unconsciously, for the dream I am about to recount, lay in the fact that he had, in America, had a Jewish disciple, by whom he had been introduced into orthodox Jewish Society, and led to the more or less careful study of the Talmud. Thus he had a clearer sense of the background of thought which S. Paul stood forth, than is at all common. Still an added factor in his study of Christianity, that is worth remembering, was his familiarity, in America, with the movement known as Christian Science (ibid.).

About the experience the swami had had while aboard the *Prinz Regent Luitpold*, Nivedita writes:

It was night, and the ship on which he had embarked at Naples, was still on her way to



Prinz Regent Luitpold  
in 1894



Old map of Crete Island, Greece

Port Said, when he had his dream. An old and bearded man appeared before him, saying 'Observe well this place that I show to you. You are now in the Island of Crete. This is the land in which Christianity began.' In support of this origin of Christianity, the speaker gave two words—one of which was *Therapeutæ*—and showed both to be derived direct from Sanskrit roots. ... 'The proofs are all here,' added the old man, pointing to the ground. 'Dig, and you will find!'

The Swami woke, feeling that he had had no common dream and tumbled out on deck, to take the air. As he did so, he met a ship's officer, turning in from his watch. 'What is the time?' he asked him.

'Midnight,' was the answer.

'And where are we?'

'Just fifteen miles off Crete!'

This unexpected coincidence startled the Swami, lending inevitable emphasis to the dream itself. The experience now seemed to precipitate elements, that without it, would have lain in his mind meaningless and unrelated (231–2).

But without a few more lines that Nivedita further wrote, the real meaning of the dream would remain incomprehensible:

He confessed afterwards that up to this time it had never occurred to him to doubt the historic personality of Christ, and that after this, he could never rely upon it. ...

But while his vision thus exercised an undeniable influence over his own mind, he would have thought it insanity to offer it as evidence to any other. The function of such an experience, if admitted at all, was to his thinking, subjective alone. He might be led by it to doubt the historic character of Jesus of Nazareth; but he never referred to Crete as the probable birthplace of Christianity. That would be an hypothesis for secular scholarship alone, to prove or disprove (232–3).

Finally, Nivedita categorically declared that never had such 'intellectual dubiety in any way dim the brightness of his love for the Son of Mary. To Hindu thinking, it is the perfection of the ideal, as ideal, that matters, and not the truth of its setting in space and time' (233).

Another incident, with a quite different hue, needs to be retold here, for it depicts the indomitable personality of the swami. During his voyage aboard the *Luitpold*, Vivekananda had to endure two Christian missionaries, journeying from Aden to Colombo, who almost untiringly criticized Hinduism by

contrasting it with their own religion. However offensive their method of arguments was, it hardly could stand against the swami's clear and precise refutations. But, instead of pacifying the missionaries, made them more aggressive and openly abusive to the religion of the swami. We have a picture of what followed: 'The Swami stood it as long as he could; then walking close to one of the speakers he suddenly seized him quietly but firmly by the collar and said half-humorously, half-grimly, "If you abuse my religion again, I'll throw you overboard!" The frightened missionary "shook in his boots" and said under his breath, "Let me go, sir, I'll never do it again!"'<sup>57</sup> From then on those two religionists became the epitome of exceeding kindness to Vivekananda.

Another incident of distinction reveals the role the swami and the mission that he had in mind would play for the distressed people of India:

Nothing further of interest occurred on the voyage, except an event such as is always sensational to travellers at sea. Signals of distress were sighted some distance from the Coast of Malabar, sent by a coasting-vessel that had been becalmed. It was discovered that the ship was without food or water, and its Captain requested immediate help. The Captain of the *Prinz Regent Luitpold* signalled back; the steamer slowed down; a boat was sent from the ship in distress and was fitted by the steamer with the needed supplies' (2.162).

In the early morning of 15 January 1897 Vivekananda had his first glimpse of the coast of Ceylon, then a British crown colony, and 'gradually the harbour of Colombo with its majestic cocoa palms and its yellow-sanded beach came into view' (ibid.). But the swami, in spite of his expressed confidence, was not sure of what exactly awaited him in India. We know,

however, that while talking with his disciples in Detroit, months before this voyage, he suddenly became emotional and said: 'India must listen to me! I shall shake India to her foundations. I shall send an electric thrill through her national veins. Wait! You shall see how India will receive me. It is India, my own India, that knows truly how to appreciate that which I have given so freely here, and with my life's blood, as the spirit of Vedanta. India will receive me in triumph' (2.166).

But the swami, perhaps, had nurtured doubts also. On 14 November 1896 J J Goodwin wrote to Mrs Ole Bull: 'The Swami is feeling very uncertain as to the way in which he will be received in India, and expects to get the cold shoulder to a great extent, in which case he says that he will consider his proper course to be to revisit America and England after a short rest merely, in India. He intends to arrange lectures in Japan and China on his way back to the States' (2.165).

What Goodwin later wrote to Mrs Bull aboard the ship on 3 January 1897, mailed from Port Said, is a clear indication that Swamiji, notwithstanding the adverse weather and his probable worries or expectations, was enjoying the voyage: 'The Swami has entered for some of the tournaments on the boat—of the committee for which, by the bye, I was made chairman.'<sup>58</sup> And when the *Prinz Regent Luitpold* neared the shores of Colombo, whatsoever were the expectations or, perhaps, the apprehensions, all proved to be equally wrong.

### Interlude

Addressing the day Vivekananda reached Colombo as a 'memorable' one 'in the annals of the Hindu Community' over there, the *Ceylon Independent* exquisitely recorded the day of 'home-coming' for posterity:



As the day was closing and the night approached, when the auspicious and sacred hour of 'Sandhya' noted by the Hindu Shastras as the best suited for devotion came round as the harbinger of the coming great events of the day, the sage of noble figure, of sedate countenance with large, luminous eyes, arrived, dressed in the orange garb of a sannyasin, accompanied by the Swami Niranjanananda and others. ... No words can describe the feelings of the vast masses and their expressions of love, when they saw the steam launch bearing the sage, steaming towards the jetty. ... The din and clamour of shouts and hand-clapping drowned even the noise of the breaking waves. The Hon. Mr P Coomaraswamy stepped forward, followed by his brother, and received the Swami garlanding him with a beautiful jasmine wreath. Then came a rush. ... No amount of physical force could hold back the great multitude.<sup>59</sup>

Fortunately, we also have a description of the same event as seen from the ship by Goodwin, who wrote:

We reached Colombo at 4 o'clock on Friday, January 15, and caught sight of a steam launch coming out with a sannyasi on board, who proved to be Swami Niranjananada. ... It took us a long time to put ashore, but when we did, we

found a dense crowd waiting, who cheered the Swami vociferously. The Swami then entered a carriage drawn by two horses, and with coachman and syces in gorgeous livery. ... We drove slowly through the city to the Cinnamon Gardens. There, in Barnes St, a new house, never before occupied, was placed at our disposal. ... The road leading up to the house for a quarter of a mile was beautifully decorated with palm branches, and with, at either end, a very beautiful triumphal arch of bamboo, and the words 'Welcome to Swami Vivekananda'. Flags and banners were everywhere. ... The procession was headed by the native band, tomtoms, etc., and the sacred umbrellas and banners brought out only when a god or idol is in procession, were also used (2.169).

On Tuesday, 26 February 1897 Vivekananda left Ceylon by boat and arrived at Pamban on the same date, and thereby reached the mainland of India. Thus began his great lecture tours, later becoming famous as 'Lectures from Colombo to Almora', and a trail of overwhelming ovations and receptions that followed the swami wherever he went. Untiringly he kept on spreading his reverberating message throughout the country to bring back the masses from their long stupor.

*Colombo Harbour,  
Ceylon, c.1890*





Before returning to the West for a second time, Vivekananda remained in India for around two and half years. He established the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, which led the course of Indian spiritual aspirations to a unique path. Swami Gambhirananda writes:

When Swamiji left the shores of India, he had behind him a record of successes any one of which could make a leader justly feel proud. He had aroused the dormant spirit of the nation and directed it along constructive channels. To the Ramakrishna Math and Mission he had given shape and substance. ... In addition there grew up a number of permanent centres, and more were in process of incubation. In a word, the dreams of Vivekananda was well on its way to fulfilment, proving that he could not only feel and think but could also act, and that vigorously.<sup>60</sup>

But such achievements hardly allowed him any rest. It was work, work, and more work all around; a break was available only when his failing health made it imperative. But even then his indomitable spirit mostly overcame his physical complaints or the loving concern of his brother disciples and admirers. Perhaps he knew that time was fast running out, and there was hardly sufficient time to achieve his plans. Practicality always made inroads to whatever invincibility one projects, and, therefore, Vivekananda could not carry on for long. Everyone was in agreement that he needed rest, and that it should begin with a long sea voyage. On 2 June 1899 the *Indian Mirror*, referring to the Bengal correspondent of the *Hindu*, wrote: 'Swami Vivekananda has not yet been able to completely shake off his ailment. Yet he has decided to leave for Europe and will probably embark early in June. The Swami, we believe, has a double object in view, viz., to benefit his health

by the voyage, and to resume his work in England and America after complete recovery.'<sup>61</sup>

Therefore, on 20 June 1899 Swamiji, accompanied by Swami Turiyananda and Sister Nivedita, left the Calcutta port on the River Hooghly aboard the *SS Golconda*. The ship was en route to London. Both the companions of the swami had different purposes for being in the entourage. Swami Turiyananda went to assist Swamiji in his Vedanta work in the West, while Nivedita had plans to raise funds in the West and attract adequate concern for her newly opened girls' school in Calcutta.

(To be continued)

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54. Information on the *Prinz Regent Luitpold* has been taken mainly from: <<http://www.ellisland.org/shipping/Format-ship.asp?shipid=753>>; <<http://www.oultton.com/cwa/newships.nsf/45cc5cb7c20526ef85256529004f20fo/de98413c902efaa885256907003b3654!OpenDocument>>; and <<http://www.histarmar.com.ar/MarinaMercanteExtr/UnitedFruit/ListadosFlotas/Ship%20Descriptions%20-%20P-Q.htm>> accessed 11 January 2012.
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56. Sister Nivedita, *The Master As I Saw Him* (Kolkata: Udbodhan, 2007), 229.
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59. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2.166–7.
60. Swami Gambhirananda, *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1957), 132–3.
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# Svarajya Siddhih: Attaining Self-dominion

Gangadharendra Saraswati

(Continued from the previous issue)

सत्यं भावं न वित्तिर्व्यपनुदति यतः कर्मनाशयो घटादि  
मिथ्याभूतं च कर्म क्षपयति न तथा वित्तिघात्यं यतस्तत् ।  
इत्थं सिद्धे विभागे श्रुतिशिखरगिरा वित्तिघात्यः प्रतीतो-  
बन्धो मिथ्येति सिद्धे न तदपहतये कर्मजातं समर्थम्

॥ ६ ॥

The [non-superimposed] positive entity is not destroyed by valid knowledge as pot and other objects are destroyed by actions. Similarly, actions do not destroy the superimposed and so, that [superimposition] is destroyed by valid knowledge. The difference in the nature [of the superimposed and the non-superimposed] being established, [the superimposed] is destructible by the knowledge obtained from the mountain of Shrutis. The falsity having been established with certainty, [meritorious] actions are incapable of destroying it.

VERSES 6–11 ARE in the *sragdharā* metre. It is common knowledge that objects like pots are destroyed by actions like hitting them with a hammer and the like. The non-superimposed positive entity is not destroyed by the valid knowledge of Reality.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, false perception like that of silver in nacre is destroyed only by the true knowledge of Reality. Thus, by inference, the difference in the nature of

the non-superimposed and the superimposed is established just like the difference between water and fire. The Shrutis, or Vedas, are like mountains according to the *Taittiriya Brahmana*<sup>8</sup>, glorious in their content and power. The study of these texts, which are in a continuum like a garland of sentences, leads to the firm understanding of the ignorance and duality of the falsity of superimposition. This falsity of superimposition is established by *anupalabdhi*, non-apprehension, and *arthāpatti*, presumption.

If a person known to be alive is not found at home, and his whereabouts outside the house are not clear, then it is presumed that he is outside the house. The Vedic rituals, transitory in nature, are means to the enjoyment of heaven, attaining something in between, or the creation of *apūrva*, potency. It is known that knowledge arising out of the Shrutis removes bondage. Since the reality of bondage is not possible, its falsity is presumed. Superimposition cannot be destroyed by external actions and the actions performed by the mind, both worldly and Vedic, like the Agnihotra sacrifice and other rituals. The impermanence of the fruits of actions have been proclaimed by scriptural texts like: ‘Since these eighteen constituents

of a sacrifice, on whom the inferior karma has been said to rest, are perishable because of their fragility, therefore those ignorant people who get elated with the idea “this is [the cause of] bliss”, undergo old age and death over and again.”<sup>9</sup>

Further, the destruction of the pot and the like by a hammer in a dream leads one to doubt the existence of multiple realities—in sleep, or dream, or the waking state. This is being clarified. Though the pot is destroyed in a dream, upon waking one sees the pot and an impression is created in the mind. Since the incidence of striking the pot with a hammer in the dream is different from the incidence of the undamaged pot in the waking state, and because both similar and contrary instances cannot be present at the same time, the apprehension of the pot in the waking state is valid due to its continuity. That is why when something is lost in a dream, it is apprehended again in the waking state. When a person whose son has been killed in a dream wakes up, he sees his son alive and the perception in the dream is countered by the statement: ‘My son has not been killed.’

In reality, even in the waking state, objects like the pot are false. The characteristic of destruction is dependent on the destruction of ignorance, which is an effect of knowledge. Even by the striking of the hammer and the like only the form of objects like the pot disappears, but they are not entirely destroyed. The pot is destroyed but not its pot-ness. Otherwise there will be no knowledge of the destroyed objects like the pot, since there will be no relation between the existence and the non-existence of the object.

Good and evil actions cause various births. The *Chhandogya Upanishad* says:

Among them those who were performers of meritorious deeds here will indeed attain good births in a quick manner—birth as a brahmana, or birth as a kshatriya, or birth as a vaishya. On the other hand, those who were performers of

bad deeds here will indeed attain bad births in a quick manner—birth as a dog, or birth as a pig, or birth as a chandala. On the other hand, through neither of these two paths are born those small creatures that transmigrate again and again. This third state is indicated by the words, ‘be born and die.’<sup>10</sup>

However, a being who is transmigrating thus is instantly liberated upon the exhaustion of the fruits of all actions, karmas. The Bhagavadgita says: ‘The fire of knowledge reduces all actions to ashes,’<sup>11</sup> and the *Taittiriya Upanishad* proclaims: ‘Him [the enlightened man] indeed, this remorse does not afflict: “Why did I not perform good deeds, and why did I perform bad deeds?”’<sup>12</sup> The scriptures thus establish that knowledge destroys all karmas and is a means to liberation.

Objection: Even if it is proved that knowledge is the means to liberation, since only the bondage caused out of ignorance is destroyed by knowledge, it is yet to be proved that the cause of bondage is ignorance. The followers of the Nyaya-Vaisheshika schools of Kanada and Gautama hold that bondage is caused due to the impression of false knowledge. The adherents of Sankhya-Yoga of Kapila and Patanjali hold that bondage is caused due to non-knowledge of Purusha and Prakriti. The followers of the Mimamsa school of Bhatta and Prabhakara hold the cause of bondage to be actions alone. The adherents of other schools like the Buddhists and the Jains also cite different causes for bondage. Then, how is it that ignorance can be held as the cause of bondage?

This objection is being answered and the student is initiated by the teacher into the means of knowledge.

आविष्टो ह्येष बन्धो विरमति न विना वेदनं कर्मजालै-  
र्मालोद्भूताऽहिरस्तं व्रजति किमु नमस्कारमन्त्रौषधाद्यैः ।  
एवं निश्चित्य नागस्त्वचमिव विधिना कर्मबन्धं विधूय-  
ज्ञानोपाये गुरुश्रीचरणमभिगतः सेवमानो यतेत ॥ ७ ॥

This bondage is surely caused by ignorance and will not be destroyed without knowledge [of Reality]. Does the snake superimposed on a garland go away by salutations, chanting of mantras, or medicines? Know for certain [this does not happen], and renounce the bondage of actions just as a snake sheds its old skin, and serve the guru's lotus feet and strive to attain knowledge.

The body and senses bind us like a chain and cause suffering. This bondage further constrained by space, time, and causation arises out of ignorance. Valid knowledge is obtained through six methods of knowledge: perception, inference, verbal testimony, comparison, presumption, and non-apprehension.<sup>13</sup> The word *hi* refers to these methods of knowledge. Without the realization of the essence of the substratum, Brahman, the net of actions or fruit of actions does not go away. Actions do not bring liberation, rather they create bondage. In darkness or dim light one imagines a snake in a garland that does not go away even on repeating mantras or using medicines, which are some common methods used to drive away snakes. These methods do not work in this case, though they have been found effective in other cases. Why? Because the very snake that is to be driven away is illusory! Similarly, the net of actions will not be eradicated by further actions; ignorance will not be destroyed by actions because of the falsity of ignorance.

We have to understand that actions are useless in obtaining liberation. Having understood this with certainty, the aspirant qualified with traits like dispassion strives to attain knowledge. The traits required of an aspirant are discernment [between the real and unreal], dispassion [for all results of action here and hereafter], restraint of the mind, restraint of the sense organs, withdrawing of the self, forbearance, self-settledness, faith, and the desire for liberation.<sup>14</sup> Just as a

snake sheds its old skin, the aspirant having all these qualities should give up all actions—the *nitya*, regular, and the *naimittika*, special—as these cause bondage. The renunciation should be spontaneous and would be so if true dispassion arises as in this parable of Sri Ramakrishna:

A man was going to bathe; he had his towel on his shoulder. His wife said to him: 'You are worthless. You are getting old and still you cannot give up some of your habits. You cannot live a single day without me. But look at that man! What a renouncer he is!' Husband: 'Why? What has he done?' Wife: 'He has sixteen wives and he is renouncing them one by one. You will never be able to renounce.' Husband: 'Renouncing his wives one by one! You are crazy. He won't be able to renounce. If a man wants to renounce, does he do it little by little?' Wife (smiling): 'Still he is better than you.' Husband: 'You are silly; you don't understand. He cannot renounce. But I can. See! Here I go!' ... That is called intense renunciation. No sooner did the man discriminate than he renounced. He went away with the towel on his shoulder. He didn't turn back to settle his worldly affairs. He didn't even look back at his home. He who wants to renounce needs great strength of mind.<sup>15</sup>

(To be continued)

### Notes and References

7. A positive entity is posited here to do away with the destruction of the *pratiyogī*, counter-positive, of the *prag-dhvaṃsābhāva*, previous non-existence, of valid knowledge.
8. *Taittiriya Brahmana*, 3.10.11.4.
9. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 1.2.7.
10. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 5.10.7–8.
11. *Bhagavadgita*, 4.37.
12. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 2.9.1.
13. They are respectively: *pratyakṣa*, *anumāna*, *upamāna*, *śabda*, *arthāpatti*, and *anupalabdhī*.
14. See *Vedānta-sāra*, 15.
15. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 750.



# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



## **Mantras for Peace of Mind**

J P Vaswani

Gita Publishing House, Sadhu Vaswani Mission, 10 Sadhu Vaswani Path, Pune 411 001. Website: [www.dadavaswanisbooks.org](http://www.dadavaswanisbooks.org). 2011. 185 pp. Price not mentioned.

**J**apa, repetition of a mantra or a holy name of God, is recognized in every religious and mystical tradition of the world as a potent tool to attain the Divine. It starts by elevating an aspirant's ordinary consciousness to a higher level and opens the portals to illumination and liberation.

In *Mantras for Peace of Mind* J P Vaswani takes up a wide range of mantras found in Hinduism. The presentation is unique: each section starts with a clear and eloquent exposition on the efficacy and significance of each mantra; follows a story from the lives of great saints and sages; then a 'Positive Visualization', where the author explains the technique of performing japa for a particular mantra for maximum benefit; and finally, each section is closed with 'FAQ', in which simple and instructive answers to questions that may trouble seekers are clarified. This style of presentation shows how seekers should proceed in their sadhana.

J P Vaswani teaches about the efficacy of a mantra bestowed by the guru: 'In his intuitive wisdom, the Guru is aware of our spiritual need and the level of our spiritual growth; and can thus choose the right NAME or Naama which can assist our progress to eventual Liberation' (22-3). A mantra is not just an utterance that is passed on, but a spontaneous spiritual experience. The 'guru mantra is a combination of sacred sounds, high energy waves, healing vibrations and transformative power of the guru's special grace and compassion for us' (23). For beginners who seek benefit from the healing powers of mantras J P Vaswani says: 'If you have not received any *mantra*, you can meditate on the

*mantra* which is enshrined in the soul of India—The Mantra, "Om" (also pronounced as "Aum") or the sacred name, "Rama" (11). He also teaches that any mantra that draws one can be taken up as each mantra is an aspect of the Eternal One.

For worshippers of God with form there are mantras for various deities like Shiva, Rama, Vishnu, and Ganapati. For the followers of the formless there are mantras like Om, Om Tat Sat, Gayatri, and so on. Many sacred chants and verses from the Upanishads are included in the book and their respective significance and power of transformation is explored. There are mantras for those afflicted by miseries, for those seeking peace, prosperity, and harmony, and there is even a chapter dedicated to 'Mantras for all Faiths'. The book is sure to become a cherished possession for spiritual aspirants and also for anyone interested in spirituality. It will reinvigorate and refresh pilgrims on the path as well as those who have made considerable progress.

Sudesh

A devotee from Ambala



## **The Call Eternal**

B P Singhal

Selective & Scientific Books, C-73/B, Ground Floor, Pandav Nagar, Patparganj, Delhi 110 092. Website: [www.ssbooks.in](http://www.ssbooks.in). 2010. xxvi + 388 pp. ₹ 395.

**T**he author is a highly successful former officer from the Indian Police Service and a Member of Parliament. The book draws on the wealth of experiences that life offered such a person. Although it starts impressively, it gradually becomes a bit tedious, without offering much insight. There is a fair degree of repetition and some of the arguments are simplistic; for instance: 'Everyone enjoys cleanliness; they abhor filth' (31). If that were truly the case, in India at least, we would

not have such filth around. The author also coins terms that sound slightly strange, such as 'anti-logic' (245) or 'anti-human being' (278).

There is plenty to learn, however, from *The Call Eternal*. The values taught are relevant, especially to young people. This passage is striking: 'Every individual, every society and every nation is rushing at a hectic pace for achieving PROGRESS without having the haziest idea of what is "progress". They do not even tarry to ponder how and why mighty civilizations progressed themselves into extinction. The truly wondrous developments achieved by Science and Technology have brought about unprecedented amelioration in the physical conditions of human life but they have also brought about equally unprecedented moral and spiritual degradation. It is therefore of paramount importance to first define exactly what is progress in the context of the individual and in the context of the Nation respectively' (280). The author provides ample guidance in finding out what should be the goal of life: 'A goal is to life what a lighthouse is to ships' (377). And that is well put.

The layout is not professional and the proof-reading should have been much better.

Nileen Putatunda

A devotee from Kolkata

In the first part of his life as a poor orphan, Swami Adbhutananda had every circumstance against him. In the second part of his unsophisticated life, the very best came his way: a guru who is an avatara, steadfast devotion to the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi—in whom he saw the Divine Mother—interaction with renowned spiritual giant brother-disciples, and finally his own illumination. All this was possible due to his great faith in and devotion to his guru, along with a childlike innocence. Swami Vivekananda said of him: 'Latu is the greatest miracle of Sri Ramakrishna.'

The popular *Sri Sri Latu Maharajer Smritikatha*, in Bengali, was ably translated and serially published in the Order's English journal *Vedanta Kesari* over many years. All this material has now been collected in book form. The recorder, Chandrashekhar Chattopadhyay, kept notes of his interactions with the usually reticent Swami Adbhutananda, with whom he had a warm and devoted association for many years. These reminiscences reveal in detail the dynamic praxis of religion and spirituality. Swami Adbhutananda's wonderful life will continue to inspire people and be a source of strength for ages to come.

PB

## BOOK RECEIVED



### Hinduism

Swami Gurudasananda

Adarsha Printers, 133(c)/2, Kammamma Street, Bellary 583 101. E-mail: [adarshaprinters.bly@gmail.com](mailto:adarshaprinters.bly@gmail.com). 2011. 111 pp. ₹ 50.

Reprinted guidelines in understanding the basic tenets of Hinduism or Sanatana Dharma.



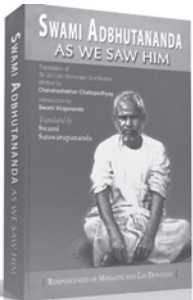
### Devī Stavah

Nityananda Sastri;

trans. Br. Ashok

Isha Prakashana, P B No 31, Puri - 1. E-mail: [aum\\_isha@yahoo.co.in](mailto:aum_isha@yahoo.co.in). 2010. 93 pp. ₹ 30.

A Sanskrit hymn on the Divine Mother composed and commented by a scholar who is the son of Sri Madhava of Jodhpur.



### Swami Adbhutananda as We Saw Him

Chandrashekhar  
Chattopadhyay; trans. Swami  
Satswarupananda

Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004. Website: [www.chennaiamath.org](http://www.chennaiamath.org). 2011. xvii + 464 pp. ₹ 175.

Sri Ramakrishna once said to his rustic disciple Latu—later Swami Adbhutananda: 'One day the gems of the Vedas and Vedanta will pour forth from your lips.' Sri Ramakrishna did not obviously mean that the unlettered Swami Adbhutananda would take up the gruelling study of the Vedas and Vedanta, but would plunge into the vast spiritual world, arrive directly at the source of the Vedas and Vedanta, and speak those truths in simple language to ordinary people. This is the essence of the book.

# REPORTS

## **Commemoration of the 175th Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna**

The valedictory celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's 175th birth anniversary was held at Belur Math on 22, 24, and 25 February 2012. The celebration began on 22 February with a colourful procession from Dakshineswar to Belur Math, in which about 13,000 persons of different faiths participated. On arrival of the procession at Belur Math, Srmat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, formally inaugurated the celebration by lighting 175 lamps. This was followed by a meeting on the theme 'Spiritual Significance of the Advent of Sri Ramakrishna'. On 24 February a parliament of religions was held with speakers from Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, and Jainism. On the concluding day there was a conference on the philosophy and spiritual realizations of Sri Ramakrishna vis-à-vis earlier avatars like Buddha, Shankara, and Chaitanya. Cultural programmes were held in the evening on each of the days. A large number of monks, devotees, and admirers attended the programmes on all the days.

The following centres also celebrated the 175th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna. **Bhubaneswar:** a spiritual retreat on 19 February, in which about 450 devotees participated; a religious meeting at Shiksha O Anusandhan University, Bhubaneswar, in which about 250 persons, mostly doctors and medical students, took part; and the opening of eight study circles in rural areas of Cuttack district from September to December 2011. **Chandigarh:** a drama on Sri Ramakrishna's



*Procession from Dakshineswar to Belur Math*

childhood and a mono-act play on a few events of Sri Ramakrishna's life on 22 February 2012. **Chennai Math:** public meetings, parliament of religions, congregation of monks, youth convention, and cultural programmes from 22 to 26 February, all attended by thousands of devotees, monks, and admirers. **Cooch Behar:** a procession on 19 February. **Delhi:** A four-day lecture series on 'Sri Rama to Sri Ramakrishna' from 13 to 16 February. **Gol Park:** a music festival on 12 February, in which distinguished vocal and instrumental artistes performed. **Hyderabad:** release of a video DVD titled 'A Pilgrimage to Belur Math'. **Itanagar:** a religious meeting, guided meditation, and cultural programmes on 19 February. **Jamshedpur:** exhibition and cultural competitions in 16 schools and 1 college from 7 December 2011 to 19 February 2012. **Kadapa:** devotional singing on 26 February. **Kamarupukur:** a public meeting at Arambagh on 15 February, which was attended by about 1,000 persons. **Kankurgachhi:** guided meditation and *japa yajna* on 12 February, in which about 700 devotees took part, and a seminar on *Sri Ramakrishna O Banga-Rangamancha* (Sri Ramakrishna and the Theatres of Bengal) on 18 February, attended by nearly 900 persons. **Mangalore:** a classical music programme on 18–19 February. **Medinipur:** a spiritual retreat on 24 February, in which 342 devotees took part. **Puri Mission:** an interfaith meeting on 25 February, in which representatives of 6 faiths spoke; a spiritual retreat on 26 February, in which

about 200 devotees took part; and the release of a commemorative volume on Sri Ramakrishna. **Rajkot:** a drama on Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings on 26 February. **Seva Pratishthan:** cultural programmes and a spiritual congregation on 18–19 February. **Silchar:** a public meeting, devotional singing, and cultural programmes in the month of February. **Tiruvalla:** religious convention on 8 January, which was attended by about 400 devotees.

Outside India **Dhaka** centre organized a procession, a devotees' convention, an interreligious conference, discourses, cultural programmes, and other activities from 17 to 19 February. Mr Enamul Hoque Mostafa Shahid, Minister of Social Welfare, Mr Suranjit Sen Gupta, Minister of Railways State, Dr Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury, Minister for Women and Children Affairs, and several other distinguished persons spoke in the meetings organized by the centre as part of its five-day-long Sri Ramakrishna's birthday celebration from 20 to 24 February.

### **Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda**

**Chennai Math** started celebrating from this year the nine-day stay of Swamiji at *Vivekanandar Illam* (Vivekananda House), Chennai, from 6 to 14 February 1897, as *Vivekananda Navaratri*, with devotional singing, cultural programmes, and readings from Swamiji's lectures. A large number of devotees and youths attended the celebrations held at *Vivekanandar Illam*.

Many other centres held different functions and activities with great enthusiasm.

### **Headquarters and Branch Centres**

Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj inaugurated the newly constructed extension of the Pre-probationers' Training Centre building at **Belur Math** on 1 February.

A special general meeting of the members of the Ramakrishna Mission was held at **Belur Math** on 5 February to consider some proposed amendments to the Memorandum of Association and Rules and Regulations of the Ramakrishna Mission. Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj chaired the meeting.

On the occasion of Magh Mela **Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Allahabad**, organized a medical camp, discourses, devotional singing, and an exhibition depicting the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda at Triveni Sangam from 9 January to 7 February. In all, 15,433 patients were treated at the medical camp and nearly 90,000 people witnessed the exhibition.

**Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Kolkata**, organized a round-the-clock medical camp during Makara Sankranti Mela at Sagar Island in South 24-Parganas district from 10 to 16 January. In all, 5,574 patients were treated, out of which 28 received indoor medical care. Besides, 167 blankets and 130 pieces of clothing were distributed to needy pilgrims and monks.

**Ramakrishna Math, Madurai**, conducted a programme on 2 February to commemorate Swami Vivekananda's visit to Madurai and his talk at Madura College Higher Secondary School on 2 February 1897. It has been decided to celebrate this day each year as 'Vivekananda Day'.

The newly built archway at the entrance to the **Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Silchar**, was inaugurated on 3 February.

On 4 February **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur**, organized a farmers' fair, in which more than 10,000 farmers participated. It was inaugurated by Sri Chandrashekhar Sahu, Minister of Agriculture, Chhattisgarh.

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, consecrated the newly built



temple, with a marble image of Sri Ramakrishna, at Dhaleswar, Agartala—sub-centre of **Ramakrishna Math, Viveknagar**—on 7 February, the birthday of Swami Adbhutananda. About 10,000 local devotees, 500 delegates from different parts of India and Bangladesh, and 164 monks attended the four-day programme, which comprised discourses, devotional singing, a procession, and a drama from 6 to 9 February.

**Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ranchi Morabadi**, organized a central farmers' fair on 9 and 10 February, which was inaugurated by Sri Sudesh Mahto, Deputy Chief Minister of Jharkhand; about 15,000 farmers and villagers participated in the fair.

On 11 February the Computer Centre of Shilpamandira—a unit of **Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Belur**—held a seminar on 'ICT in Rising Bengal'. Swami Prabhananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the seminar, in which Sri N R Narayana Murthy, Chairman Emeritus, Infosys Limited, was the chief speaker.


## Relief

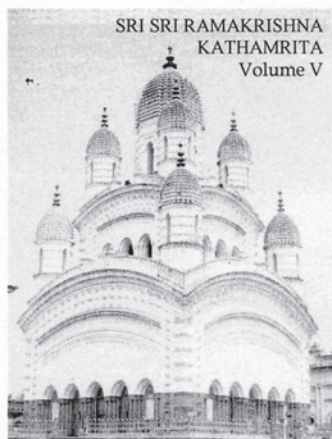
**Distress Relief** · The following centres distributed various items to needy people. Agartala: 500 sets of children's garments, 360 saris, and 50 dhotis; Belgaum: 568 bed sheets and 284 sets of utensils (each set comprising 2 cooking vessels, 1 ladle, 5 plates, 5 cups, 5 spoons, and 1 knife); Belgharia: 106 saris, 22 lungis, 607 shirts, 1,419 pants, 712 frocks, 11 sets of salwar and kameez, 20 kg soya bean cakes, and 3.5 kg cornflakes; Cherrapunjee: 501 saris; Guwahati: 52 saris, 12 dhotis, 100 plates, and 100 kg protein powder; Puri Mission: 1,600 saris; Ramharipur: 1,419 saris; Thrissur: school uniforms to 299 students.

**Flood Relief** · In the wake of the devastating floods that hit most of the Western Viti Levu towns of Fiji, Nadi centre, despite itself being about two feet under water, started extensive primary relief work in the nearby affected areas.

The centre served nearly 2,200 cooked meals and distributed 392 grocery packs (each pack containing 2 kg rice, 2 kg pulses, 1 kg sugar, 500 gm salt, 200 gm spices, 2 packets of breakfast crackers, 1 packet of powdered milk, 500 ml cooking oil, 1 can of baked beans or peeled tomatoes, and other items) among the affected people. Besides, 65 people were provided medical care. In India the following centres continued flood relief operations in Odisha and West Bengal. Puri Math distributed 600 kg chira, 325 kg sugar, 2,000 candles, 1,000 matchboxes, and 100 kg bleaching powder among 976 families in Balarampur and Ketakipatanana gram panchayats in Puri district. Puri Mission gave 5,000 blankets to 5,000 families of Gop, Puri Sadar, Konark, Delang, and Kanas blocks in Puri district. Antpur distributed 500 saris and 200 dhotis among 700 families of Antpur, Radhanagar, and Rajbalhat areas in Hooghly district. Sargachhi gave 1,000 blankets to 1,000 families of Jalangi, Suti-I, Khargram, Krishnanagar, Berhampore, and Beldanga-I blocks in Murshidabad district. Sikra Kulingram distributed 250 blankets among 250 families of Ramapur village in Hingalganj block in North 24-Parganas district.

**Fire Relief** · Gol Park centre continued its relief work among the families whose huts had been gutted by a devastating fire in Kalikapur area, near E M Bypass, Kolkata, by distributing 225 saris among the victims from 30 January to 1 February.

**Winter Relief** · 13,952 blankets were distributed through the following centres to needy people. Almora, 250; Antpur, 600; Asansol, 914; Baranagar Mission, 600; Belgharia, 300; Bhubaneswar, 200; Contai, 300; Chapra, 2,000; Gol Park, 250; Guwahati, 450; Jaipur, 250; Jamtara, 250; Kamarpukur, 1,000; Kankurgachhi, 250; Katihar, 100; Khetri, 131; Mysore, 250; Naora, 250; Narendrapur, 300; Ootacamund, 307; Puri Mission, 250; Ramharipur, 2,000; Saradapitha, 500; Sikra Kulingram, 350; Taki, 250; Vrindaban, 950. Besides, Belgharia, Chapra, and Guwahati centres distributed 13 woollen garments, 1,350 sweaters, and 123 sweaters respectively to needy children. Dinajpur centre in Bangladesh distributed 700 blankets and 500 winter garments. 



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## CONSTRUCTION OF A CHARITABLE DISPENSARY

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Malda, is a branch of Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, Howrah, and is working for the last 86 years in this small town of North Bengal.

It serves the uneducated, illiterate, ailing people, flood and drought affected people irrespective of caste, creed, and religion as per the ideas and ideals of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda.

This Ashrama runs a higher secondary school, a kindergarten, and a primary school for middle class people. Two rural primary schools are being run for tribal children who are first-generation learners. In addition to the above, six free coaching centres are being run in remote village areas. This ashrama runs an allopathic and a homoeopathic dispensary for poor slum dwellers and a mobile medical service for rural poor ailing people. About thirty thousand poor people are served free of cost in these medical units. We distribute regularly school uniforms, dhotis, sarees, blankets, and food-packets to needy village people. We are about to construct a dispensary building which will provide medical service in allopathy, homoeopathy, Eye, ENT, Dental, Paediatrics, Gynaecology, and Pathology. The cost of construction of the above building will be around ₹ 60 lakh. We request you to lend a helping hand to make this humble project a success.

For every donation of ₹ 1 lakh and more [in the memory of your relative and the like.] the donor's name will be displayed in a suitable place in the ground floor through marble plaques.

All donations for this noble cause are exempted from Income Tax u/s 80G of Income Tax Act, 1961. Account Payee Cheque/ Draft may be drawn in favour of 'Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Malda'.

Swami Parasharananda  
Secretary



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## KALA BABU KUNJ AT VRINDABAN

Kala Babu Kunj is the ancestral house of Sri Balaram Basu, an ardent devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, in the holy land of Vrindaban. After the Mahasamadhi of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi visited Vrindaban in September 1886 and stayed in this house for almost a year. In later years the place was further sanctified by the second visit of Holy Mother and all other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna including Swami Vivekananda. In 1907, Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama had its humble beginning in this same house.

With a view to develop this sacred place into a befitting memorial, we have acquired a portion of the house and renovation work is progressing apace. We are urgently in need of Rs. 1 crore for the completion of the project. We earnestly request all devotees and well-wishers to donate generously for this sacred cause. Cheques/Drafts may please be drawn in the name of 'Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Vrindaban' and sent to the address below.



*Construction in Progress*

All donations are exempt from Income-tax under section 80G of the Income Tax Act, 1961. We hope to dedicate the memorial in a befitting function in September 2012 which marks the 125th Anniversary of Holy Mother's visit to Vrindaban. Devotees are welcome to visit the site and donate any artifact or photo related to Holy Mother or Vrindaban which can be exhibited on a permanent basis at the site.

The Sevashrama is runs a 165-bed charitable hospital for the service of 'Rogi Narayan' since last 104 years. We appeal to all kind-hearted persons to donate generously for this noble cause. Donations to Infrastructure Development and Corpus Fund will avail 100% tax exemption under section 35 AC of the Income Tax Act, 1961. Donations can also be directly deposited into our AXIS Bank account (A/c No.: 9100 1001 8246 169; IFSC: UTIB0000794).

Swami Suprakashananda  
Secretary



RAMAKRISHNA MISSION SEVASHRAMA (Charitable Hospital)  
(A branch Centre of Ramakrishna Mission, PO Belur Math, dt. Howrah, WB 711202)  
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Ph : 0565-2442310, Fax: 2443310 Email: info@rkmsvrind.org Website: www.rkmsvrind.org





## APPEAL FOR RESTORATION

Ramakrishna Kutir at Almora, Uttarakhand, was founded at the behest of Swami Vivekananda by Srimat Swamis Turiyanandaji Maharaj and Shivanandaji Maharaj, celebrated monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Unprecedented rains and the cloud burst in September 2010 at Almora caused tremendous landslide, gorges, cracks, and land-sinking in the Ashrama. The changed land contour has damaged the temple and other buildings. Engineers have suggested abandoning an old building and rebuilding another inhabitable one.

This Ashrama is mainly a retreat centre where monks, devotees, and admirers of Sri Ramakrishna come, live in a spiritual atmosphere, and get peace of mind. This spirituality is still alive and vibrant. The effect of Swami Turiyanandaji's intense austerities here will remain for eternity. Apart from the continuous welfare activities for the poor people of the hill regions and needy students, this Ashrama conducted relief work by distributing 5000 woollen blankets to the victims of the said calamity and devastation in Almora district.

By the grace of Bhagawan Sri Ramakrishna and with the active cooperation of devotees and admirers of the Holy Trio, the restoration work of the land and building of the Ashrama has started since 8 April 2011. The work is in progress. We expect to complete the major restoration work of the land before rebuilding devastated houses depending on the availability of resources. We appeal to one and all to extend their helping hand to save the Ashrama. For the entire restoration and reconstruction work, we need more than ₹ 2 crore.

Cheque/Draft may please be drawn in favour of '*Ramakrishna Kutir, Almora*' and sent to: Ramakrishna Kutir, Bright End Corner, Almora, Uttarakhand 263 601. The name of the donors of ₹ 2 lakh and above will be displayed in a prominent place if they wish so. All donations are exempt from Income tax under section 80G of the Income Tax Act, 1961.

Swami Somadevananda  
Adhyaksha



RAMAKRISHNA KUTIR

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